Mothering through austerity: Exploring the role of intersectionality and the impact of welfare reform within the lives of young mothers in the UK.

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the lives of young lone mothers in the UK within a context of austerity and welfare reform. Since 2010, a range of welfare reform related policies including freezes to certain social security benefits, reforms to the Social Fund and the introduction of universal credit have severely disadvantaged many low-income families. Furthermore, extensive restructuring and retrenchments of state funded services have led to reductions in public services such as children's centres. Wider changes to the labour market have negatively affected women, and lone mothers in particular, by making secure and adequately paid employment harder to access. Changes in education such as the withdrawal of the Education Maintenance Allowance have reduced the options available to low-income young people. Taken together, recent welfare reforms introduced under the auspices of austerity have created a 'perfect storm' for young lone mothers, an already disadvantaged group of women.

My thesis seeks to understand the lived experiences of young lone mothers living in an era of austerity. To do so, I use intersectionality theory to focus on the dynamics of four key social statuses: age, gender, lone motherhood and social class. Additionally, I explore identity construction amongst this group of women using Irving Goffman's approach to stigma and performance management. Drawing on individual interviews and focus group discussions with young mothers as well as interviews with front line practitioners, I analyse how statuses intersect to create distinct stigmatised identities for young lone mothers. I also consider how changes in both local and national related austerity policy and welfare reform impact on the lives of young lone mothers as a group.

The thesis argues that age, gender, lone motherhood and social class all contribute to the stigmatisation of young lone mothers. In turn, young lone mothers respond in three main ways, namely: i) by adopting certain behaviours they feel are consistent with cultural perceptions of 'good' motherhood, ii) by rejecting traditional images of the 'good' motherhood, and iii) by highlighting the advantages of being young, lone and non-working mothers. Welfare reforms, introduced in the wake of austerity measures, have rendered young lone mothers 'invisible' in policy terms. The same reforms fail to engage with the complexity and specific challenges of the everyday lives, struggles, and ambitions of young lone mothers. Drawing on primary data, my thesis sets out to highlight some of this complexity and to develop policy relevant recommendations that will improve the life chances of young lone mothers.
In short: it seeks to give voice to one of the groups that have suffered most under austerity reforms.

List of Abbreviations

BL	Budgeting Loan
CB	Child Benefit
CCG	Community Care Grant
CLG	Child to Learn Grant
CM	Child Maintenance
CMS	Child Maintenance Service
CPAG	Child Poverty Action Group
CSA	Child Support Agency
CTB	Council Tax Benefit
CTC	Child Tax Credit
CTS	Council Tax Support
DBF	Discretionary Bursary Fund
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
FNP	Family Nurse Partnership
HB	Housing Benefit
IS	Income Support
IWC	In-Work Credit
JSA	Job Seekers Allowance
LGA	Local Government Association
LHA	Local Housing Allowance
LWA	Local Welfare Assistance
NFP	Nurse Family Partnership
NHF	National Housing Federation
NLW	National Living Wage
NMW	National Minimum Wage
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PHE	Public Health England
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
SF	Social Fund
SSP	Sure Start Plus
TFP	Troubled Families Programme
TPS	Teenage Pregnancy Strategy
TPSH	Teenage Parent Supported Housing
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UC	Universal Credit
UK	United Kingdom
WBG	Women's Budgeting Group
WTC	Working Tax Credit
WFI	Work Focused Interview
YWT	Young Women's Trust

Chapter One

Young Lone Mothers and the 'Perfect Storm'

1.1 Introduction

In 2010, a UK Coalition Government made up of the Conservative and the Liberal Democrat parties drew up an agreement that encompassed both parties' political objectives. Both parties agreed that the main focus of policy would be on reducing the deficit and stabilising the economy. They made it clear that: 'The deficit reduction programme takes precedence over any other measures in this agreement, and the speed of implementation of any measures that have a cost to the public finances will depend on decisions to be made by a Comprehensive Spending Review' (HM Government 2010 P.35). The new government cited the welfare system they inherited as 'the principle cause of welfare dependency and public sector debt' (Edmiston, 2017, P. 262). Consequently since 2010 policy makers have focused on reducing welfare state spending and reforming the social security system – changes which have arguably had devastating consequences for millions of citizens. Research indicates that social security spending will be reduced by £37 billion between 2010 and 2020 (De Henau, 2017). Furthermore, local councils in England have budgets that are, on average, 23.7 per cent smaller in 2016-17 compared to 2009-10 (Gray and Barford, 2018). There are also further reductions to come for councils leading to concerns about the potential bankruptcy of local authorities (Butler, 2019). This has resulted in spending restrictions that have led to the reduction and closure of a range of public services including children's centres, libraries and temporary housing accommodation. Funding for low-income young people in education has also been subject to reductions (Pearson, 2019), and changes in the labour market have meant the loss of thousands of jobs for women (UK Women's Budget Group, 2013). If this wasn't enough, in 2012, the new welfare benefit – Universal Credit (UC) was introduced. The Department for Work and Pensions described this as 'the most far-reaching programme of change that the welfare system has witnessed in generations (DWP, 2010 p.1).' Research looking as UC has suggested that the majority of families

will be worse off under this new system with lone parents affected the most (Tucker, 2017).

The purpose of this research is to explore the lives of poor lone mothers aged 16 to 25 within the context of current austerity and welfare reform policies. These policy changes have combined to create a 'perfect storm' for young lone mothers – an already disadvantaged group of women. This research will explore their experiences during this precarious period. hooks (1984) argues that the voices of people from minority or disadvantaged groups are seldom heard when historical accounts are given of particular events. This research will present a picture of what the lives of young lone mothers were like, drawing on their experiences, during a time of sustained cuts to public services and welfare retrenchment and reform[1]. Within this research I will present lived experiences of young lone mothers including stigma, oppression and policy changes associated with different social statuses. These statuses are: youth, gender, lone motherhood and belonging to the welfare class.

1.2 Justification for Research

Within this section I will put forward the justifications for this research and how it will contribute to the understanding of the impact of austerity and welfare reform on young lone mothers. Furthermore, I will consider the importance of understanding the disadvantage associated with different social statuses and how this impacts on the experiences of young lone mothers. Additionally, I will justify the relevance of exploring the lives of young women aged 16 to 25, rather than focusing on traditional definitions of young mothers as 'teenage' mothers.

[1] It should be noted here that many of the areas of policies I will discuss are devolved issues (including housing, education and front line services) in the UK meaning each country has different approaches. As this research is concerned with young mothers living in South West England, the policy within this thesis will solely focus on policy in England.

The impact of austerity and welfare reform on different social groups is well established. Those most affected are women (Annesley, 2013; Bennett, 2015; Himmelweit et al. 2016), low-income families (De Henau and Reed, 2016), lone mothers (Rabindrakumar, 2013; Tucker, 2017), children (Ridge, 2013; Bradshaw et al. 2017), young people aged 18-25 (Mason, 2015; Wenham, 2015), ethnic minorities (Fisher and Nandi, 2015), and those with disabilities (Goodley et al. 2014; Malli et al. 2018). However, there is currently a gap in knowledge around young lone mothers' experiences of reductions in service provision and the restructuring of welfare. This is despite evidence highlighting the distinct material and social disadvantages experienced by this group of women (SEU, 2004; Bradshaw, 2006a; Hadley, 2016) as they seek to balance their youth with motherhood while living on a restricted income.

The implications of belonging to several disadvantaged groups at one time mean citizens are targeted in different ways, based on different social characteristics. This is certainly true for young lone mothers who have a number of social statuses that make them particularly vulnerable to reductions and retrenchment in state support as well as changes to the labour market. For example, being materially disadvantaged means young lone mothers will have to claim Universal Credit (UC). Research has shown that lone mothers experience reductions in their income as a consequence of UC (Hirsch, 2012; De Agostini and Brewer, 2013; Tucker, 2017). Young lone mothers face the same experience. However, UC also has age related restrictions in that lone mothers can only claim a lower rate of the individual element[2] until they reach the age of 25[3]. This translates into a difference of £66.05 every month. As a consequence of their age therefore, young lone mothers will be nearly £800 worse off a year compared to a lone mother aged 25 and over in similar circumstances. Thus, future research looking at lone mothers will have to factor in the issue of age and reduced entitlement.

[2] The individual element of UC is paid to cover the individual living costs of the claimant. It is replacing Income Support, (Income-related) Job Seekers Allowance and (Income-related) Employment and Support Allowance.

[3] Under income support rules lone mothers can claim the higher amount once they turn 18.

There are other factors that influence the experiences of lone mothers according to their age, particularly around education and paid work. According to Tinsley (2014) qualifications amongst lone mothers are at least partly associated with age. The data he collated suggested that mothers who gave birth to their first child before the age of 25 were less likely to have left school with qualifications compared to mothers who had their first child after age 25. Other research by Ruggeri and Bird (2014) looked at working patterns amongst lone parents. They found that young mothers under 25 were less likely to be employed than their older counterparts.

As age influences the experiences of lone mothers, lone motherhood also influences the experience of young women; this is particularly true within education settings. The Coalition Government's flagship apprenticeship policy is often presented as a way for young people to learn new skills, gain qualifications and earn money at the same time (HM Government, 2015). Research suggests there are gender differences in terms of pay for young men and young women undertaking an apprenticeship. For example, the average rate of pay for childcare apprenticeships (taken up mostly by women) is £206 a week compared to electro-technical apprenticeships (taken up mostly by men) at £290 a week (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2017). This gender pay gap within apprenticeships is largely due to traditional male vocations having greater financial rewards than traditional female ones. Thus, young lone mothers undertaking an apprenticeship are subject to disadvantage because of their gender. However, young mothers undertaking an apprenticeship are also disadvantaged as lone mothers. Research by The Young Women's Trust (2017a) looked at young mothers currently undertaking apprenticeships. They found most of the young women were parenting alone and consequently struggled to balance their work with childcare. They also found 3 in 5 young mothers reported that the pay they received from their apprenticeship did not cover the basic associated costs such as travel and childcare.

In terms of youthful parenting, previous policy had targeted young mothers under 18 through the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (TPS). This approach was put forward in 1999 a couple of years after a Labour Government was elected (Social Exclusion Unit,

1999). In 2010, the Coalition Government decided to dissolve the TPS and withdraw much of the funding that was ring-fenced for this group of women (Teenage Pregnancy Independent Advisory Group, 2010). More recent policies have focused on expanding the target age group for pregnancy prevention. Under the TPS, prevention of pregnancy focused on young women under the age of 18. However, current health policy targets young people up to the age of 25. A document published in 2014 by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) raises concerns about the conception rate of young women up to age 25, the high rate or abortions within this age group and the costs to the state (including health services and wider costs such as access to benefits) if the young woman decides to continue with the pregnancy. NICE argues that if all local Clinical Commissioning Groups target young women: 'the number of abortions and unintended pregnancies leading to birth in young women up to the age of 25 is expected to reduce leading to corresponding savings for the NHS and wider society as a whole' (2014 P. 26). This approach to contraception and youthful pregnancy suggests policy is moving towards extending prevention programmes for women up to 25.

Some research looking at the long-term outcomes of young motherhood suggest that impacts continue long into their twenties and thirties. Chevalier and Viitanen (2003) who followed young mothers up until the age of 33 found that their motherhood reduced the amount of time they spent in paid work and had a detrimental long-term impact on their earned income. Other research suggests women who have their first child under the age of 20 and women who have their first child between 20 and 25 have similar long-term employment outcomes (Walker and Zhu, 2009). These studies combined with the new policy focus on conception and pregnancy for women up to 25 suggest a paradigm shift in understanding youthful pregnancy and motherhood with greater focus on young mothers up until their early to mid-twenties. By exploring the lives of young lone mothers aged 16 to 25, this research will contribute to the understanding of youthful lone motherhood in this way.

1.3 Research Design: An Intersectional Perspective

Much feminist thought is concerned with how women as a group experience oppression and marginalisation (Oakley, 1974; Lugones and Spelman, 1995; Letherby, 2003; Oakley, 2015). As women, young lone mothers are subject to gender related discrimination, however they also have other social statuses (youth, lone parenthood and social class) that impact on their lived experiences. According to Roberts (1993, p. 2) as much feminist thought focuses on gender as the 'primary locus of oppression', it risks undermining other attributes that might influence the experiences of women. Building on this, I have adopted an approach in my research that draws significantly from intersectionality theory.

The term intersectionality was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in an article written in 1989. According to Crenshaw, in order to understand the experience of black women we cannot just focus on 'discrete sources of discrimination' (1989, P. 140) assigned to each social status. Rather we should focus on how each status intersects with the other to create unique experiences for disadvantaged groups. Chambers and Erausquin (2015) have proposed an 'intersectional stigma framework' for teenage mothers. They argue that because these mothers have a number of intersecting, marginalized identities, they are likely to experience high levels of stereotyping and prejudice that will have negative consequences on their well-being and other outcomes.

To enable me to explore and present a thorough account of the lives of young lone mothers, I have identified four key social statuses that make young lone mothers vulnerable to social assumptions and stigma. These statuses are: age, gender, lone motherhood and social class. Consideration was given when selecting these statuses and my aim was to balance having enough statuses to conduct an intersectional analysis but not so many as to prevent me from being able to recruit a sample. As my research is focused on the experiences of 'young mothers' (who are also young women) during a period of austerity and welfare reform, it was appropriate to select 'age' (or 'youth') as a key status as well as gender. When conducting my literature review in preparation for designing my study – it quickly became apparent that young mothers were very likely to experience poverty (LGA, 2018) and at least some of the

stigma concerned with youthful motherhood was associated with this poverty and social class (Nayak and Kehily, 2014). However, I also found the literature on young mothers generally considered their income (and social class) to be a consequence of their youth – rather than as an individual status to disseminate and explore. Therefore, I decided social class (where I would also look at income) should be a distinct status and inform my research in the same way that age and gender would. The inclusion of lone motherhood was also based on the review of existing literature. Despite some research suggesting young mothers are more likely to be lone mothers than their older counterparts (Duncan, 2007)[4] – literature has failed to explore this as a distinct status which is associated with its own negative perceptions and consequences.

The role of policy in my research also informed the decisions made on selecting these statuses. As this research is concerned with austerity and welfare reform – it was appropriate to identify groups which have been most affected. Young mothers (as opposed to young fathers) were the main target of TPS and therefore they are more likely to be impacted by the withdrawal of TPS services (Teenage Parent Advisory Network, 2010). Furthermore, as young women wanting to pursue education, they have lost out under other reforms such as the removal of the Education Maintenance Allowance. Additionally, certain groups have been more negatively impacted by austerity and welfare reform policy. Women have been more affected than men (Annesley, 2013; Bennett, 2015; Himmelweit et al. 2016), low-income families (who are more likely to need support from the state) have seen greater reductions in their incomes than wealthier families (De Henau and Reed, 2016) and lone mothers have seen greater reductions in their incomes than partnered mothers (Rabindrakumar, 2013; Tucker, 2017). As intersectionality is concerned with oppression and disadvantage, selecting four statuses characterised by these would enable me to generate a thorough account of the hardships faced by young lone mothers.

[4] My own analysis of data in section 1.4 also suggests young mothers are likely to experience poverty and also that they are more likely to be lone mothers.

These statuses and the intersection of these statuses will inform my discussions around the prejudice attached to young lone motherhood and the subsequent formation of stigmatised identities; including how young women with children respond to these. With the exception of a small number of studies (see Mantovani and Thomas, 2013[5] for example) the majority of research and literature on young mothers has been focused on their age as the source of stigma while other social statuses these women hold have been neglected. However, when exploring young motherhood - 'youth' should not be considered in isolation because the other statuses they hold are also vulnerable to stigma. For example, stigma is likely to be associated with social class and lone motherhood (Patrick, 2016; Evans and Thane, 2012). Intersectionality will provide a good framework to better understand the complex stigmatised identities of young lone mothers.

In addition to using intersectionality to explore stigmatized identities; this theoretical approach will also form the basis to my understanding of how policy responds to young motherhood and how these responses impact on this group of women. Within many areas of policy including social security and education - citizens are often assumed to hold a single (or solo) status and access to certain aspects of the state are given on the basis of this. In regards to young lone mothers, access to social security – and the conditions attached to this support are often based on the status of being a lone parent. Currently, conditions attached to Universal Credit (UC) mean mothers must work for at least 16 hours once their youngest child turns 3 (DWP, 2019a). However, this approach to allocating social security neglects that young mothers, due to their age, may also want to continue with their education. Research suggests that young mothers are keen to pursue education (Duncan, 2007), however the conditions attached to their benefits may severely restrict them from doing so. When age is used to allocate benefits, it acts as a disadvantage to young mothers. Entitlement to UC is associated with age with lone mothers receiving a lower rate until they turn 25 (Gingerbread, 2013). This approach to allocating UC suggests policy makers have

[5] Mantovani and Thomas explored the experiences of black teenage mothers who were 'looked after' by the state. They looked at poverty, race and teenage parenthood.

focused on the age of mothers in deciding how much money they need, while neglecting their position as mothers with children to support. Therefore, by exploring the complexities of allocating support on single statuses, this research will be able to identify how this effects the experiences and life chances of young lone mothers.

In addition to using intersectionality theory to inform my understanding of stigma and oppression for this group of women, I will also draw on the work of Irving Goffman (1990a; 1990b) to understand the relationship between stigma and young lone mothers. Goffman approached identity as a social construction using a symbolic interaction approach (Ritzer, 2008). In his seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1990a) first published in 1959, Goffman argued that identity is constructed through interactions between the person and their audiences. Using a 'dramaturgy' approach, Goffman argued that people are social actors who put on performances for their audiences. These performances are, according to Goffman, actively managed by social actors to present themselves in certain ways to different audiences. When the performance in unconvincing to the audience or the actor has traits that are considered undesirable by society, this can lead to stigma. Research suggests that young mothers are subject to and report stigma from various audiences. These include: the general public (Whitehead, 2001; Yardley, 2008), health and social care professionals (Brethany and Stevens, 2007; Fessler, 2008; Smith-Battle, 2013), the media (Hadfield et al. 2007), policy makers (Duncan, 2007; Aria, 2009), their peers (Alldred and David, 2010), and even other young mothers (Jones et al. 2019).

While we all, according to Goffman, have to manage numerous identities, young lone mothers have to manage a number of identities that are socially stigmatized. The consequences of these 'stigmatized identities' means that young mothers are treated differently. They have become what can be described as the 'Other' (Lister, 2004a, P. 100), and maginalised by society. My research will explore how mothers respond to the stigma and how this affects their engagement with services such as health care and education. According to Garnier (2007), societal discourses around 'good' citizens are mostly framed by age, gender and class. As soon as citizens begin to deviate from expected behaviours associated with one of these statuses, they can be subject to

stigma. Thus, as young lone mothers, these women are vulnerable to stigma based on all of these social statuses. By using intersectionality theory my research will capture the different sources of stigma my participants experience based on the social statuses of youth, gender, lone motherhood and social class.

1.4 Young Lone Mothers: A Demographic Profile

In this section I will collate the demographic data available for young lone mothers with reference to the social statuses of age, gender, lone motherhood and social class. There are around 2.9 million lone parent families in the UK (ONS, 2019a) with around 90 per cent of these families headed by women (Gingerbread, 2019a). While I could not source data that looked at gender differences and age categories for lone parents, it is likely that most young parents between 16 and 25 are female.

Data looking at the age of lone parents has been collated by the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2019b[6]). However, data sourced from the ONS does not give individual age breakdowns of lone parents and instead categorises them into the following age groupings: 0-17, 18-20, 21-24, 25-29 and 30-34. This presents a challenge to my research. First, in the 0-17 category, only mothers aged 16 and 17 are relevant for my research. Although the conception rate for women under 16 in 2017 was 2,517, around 60 per cent of these led to a termination (ONS, 2019c). This suggests that most mothers within the 0-17 category are aged 16 and 17 and thus, I decided to include the data from this category into the statistics. The second issue concerns the inclusion of women aged 25. In the ONS data concerning 25 year olds are in the 25-29 age category. In the end, I decided not to include this group within my data, as this would have significantly overestimated my target group.

Using the data from the ONS as described above suggests there are around 133,000 lone parents aged 16-24. The definition of a lone parent by the ONS is 'a father or mother with his or her child(ren) where the parent does not have a spouse, same-sex

[6] The data is from 2017.

civil partner or partner in the household, and the child(ren) do not have a spouse, same-sex civil partner or child in the household' (2011a, P.29). This definition suggests the ONS do include households where the mother might be living with her parents or other family members as well as her children. This is helpful in terms of understanding how many young lone mothers there are because almost 11 per cent of lone parents live in multifamily households (Graham and McQuaid, 2014). Young mothers under 20 are more likely to live with their parents with around 90 per cent doing so according to Portier Le-Cocq (2017). Regardless of their living arrangements, the ONS data reflects the number of young mothers by age and has not excluded those living with other family members. Using the data provided by the ONS on lone parent household, Rabindrakumar (2018) estimates that around 7 per cent of lone parents are under the age of 25.

In terms of understanding social class, I was interested in mothers who were in receipt of social security benefits. Research indicates that young mothers, as a group, are less likely to be in employment compared to other young women and other lone mothers (Carcillo et al. 2016; ONS, 2017a;). They are also less likely to be engaged in higher education than their peers (Action for Children, 2017). This suggests young mothers are likely to be in receipt of social security. In terms of social class, it is useful to look at data on the number of lone mothers claiming income support (IS)[7] and job seekers allowance (JSA). For lone parents, IS is currently the most likely working age benefit they will be claiming if they are not in employment. Currently, lone mothers can claim IS until their youngest child turns 5[8] (Johnsen, 2014). As my target sample of young lone mothers were aged 16-25, I assumed that most would likely have younger children, and this was indeed the case for most of them.[9] The most recent data for

[7] I also used receipt of housing benefit and universal credit when recruiting my participants, however there is no age related data available for these benefits.
[8] When their youngest child turns five, they are usually moved on to Job Seekers Allowance and are expected to look for work. The rules for Universal Credit require lone mothers to be working once their child turns 3 (see Chapter Three for further discussion on this).
[9] Only three of my participants had a child of 5 or above. For one of these mothers, one had three children but only one child (aged 2 months) was currently in her care.

lone parents in receipt of IS (by age category) is from August 2017. At this point there were around 110,000 lone parents aged 18 to 25 and around 4800 aged under 18[10] in receipt of IS (DWP, 2018a). The most recent statistics for JSA come from May 2018 with 1,960 lone parents under 25 claiming this (DWP, 2018b). As around 97 per cent of lone parents claiming IS are women (DWP, 2013a), we can assume almost all of the claimants recorded are mothers. Thus, the total number of young mothers claiming a working age benefit is around 116,760. It should be noted however that this data does not include mothers who might be claiming Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). Lone parents with a child under 5 are usually advised to claim IS rather than ESA as it is much easier to qualify for IS in their current circumstances[11] (Coleman and Riley, 2012). It should also be noted that the data presented here is only a snap shot and is likely to regularly change as young lone mothers move in and out of relationships and in and out of work.

This section has attempted to quantify the number of young lone mothers in the UK currently claiming working age benefits. While the data has some limitations, it provides an indication of how many young lone mothers there are in the UK and how many are likely to be in receipt of social security benefits. The number of young lone mothers claiming a working age benefit is almost double the number in paid work[12] which is around 67,000 (Gingerbread, 2013). This further reinforces the relevance of my core research motivation in that young lone mothers are likely to be affected by changes in social security because a high percentage of them are in receipt of IS or JSA. Being in receipt of a benefit such as IS means these mothers will be on a low

[10] I included those under 18 as this would only include lone parents aged 16 and 17 because the parents of lone parents under 16 have to claim IS on their behalf.
[11] This is because claiming ESA involves taking part in the Work Capability Assessment and for IS, lone mothers need to have a child under 5 to qualify. It may be worth lone mothers claiming ESA if they are likely to be placed in the Support Group as this group is associated with a higher payment of £111.65 per week (HM Government, 2019a). This is compared with the current IS rate of £73.10 per week (HM Government, 2019b) or ESA rate of £73.10 per week if the claimant is paced in the work-related activity group (HM Government, 2019a).
[12] Although young lone mothers in paid work are also affected by welfare reform. This will be explored in Chapter Three.

income and entitled to other support such as child tax credits and housing benefit. Furthermore, their low income means they may need access to additional support such as help through the Social Fund. Consequently, as a group, they will be vulnerable to changes in all of these benefits and other additional state related support.

1.5 Aims and Objectives of Research

To enable me to design and carry out this research, I have created a number of aims and objectives. These clarify the scope of the research and the intended outcomes.

My research aims are to:

- Explore identity construction amongst young lone mothers with a particular focus on the role of stigma
- Explore how recent policy changes in a number of policy areas (i.e. housing, welfare benefits, education, child maintenance, employment and front-line services) impact upon the lives of young, lone mothers.
- To understand the lives of young lone mothers, in their own words, as they experience and live through a period of austerity and welfare reform
- Take a female centered approach and develop a methodology that reflects the experiences of young mothers
- Develop policy recommendations based on my research

To enable me to meet these aims, I propose the following objectives:

- Use existing literature to conduct a thorough review concerning young lone motherhood and the context of my research
- Use existing literature to conduct an in-depth policy analysis of how recent changes have impacted on young lone mothers

- Contact and engage with services in the South West of England that support young mothers to enable me to recruit a sample for my research
- Conduct individual face to face and focus group interviews with young, lone mothers and collect rich qualitative data
- Conduct individual face to face interviews with front line practitioners who support young mothers
- Use intersectionality theory to consider identity construction for young, lone mothers and how each of their social statuses intersects to create unique experiences for them. These statuses are: youth, woman, lone mother and belonging to the welfare class
- Conduct a current policy analysis by drawing on the experiences of my participants within various aspects of their lives including: housing, money, employment, education and methods of formal and informal support
- Use Irving Goffman's (1990a; 1990b) theory of sigma to explore why young mothers are targeted by others and how they respond to the associated stereotypes

1.6 Research Questions

This research will take an exploratory approach and will focus on the lived experiences of young lone mothers within the context of austerity welfare reform. I have designed four key research questions to enable me to capture these lived experiences:

1. How has austerity since 2010 affected young lone mothers in the UK?
2. How are young lone mothers coping with the challenges of the resulting period of welfare reform?
3. How do age, gender, lone motherhood and class intersect to create unique experiences of discrimination, stigma and disadvantage for lone mothers?
4. What formal and informal forms of financial and non-financial support are young lone mothers drawing on in times of financial hardship?

1.7 Structure of Thesis

This research is made up of eight chapters, including this introduction. In what follows, I offer a summary of the remaining chapters of my thesis:

Chapter Two: This chapter will explore the theoretical approach to my research. I will consider contemporary literature and research around young lone motherhood and then challenge the assumptions and stigma regarding their position. This will be followed by a discussion of how policy has constructed and responded to young pregnancy and parenthood since 1980. As this section will show, policy responses to this group of women are very much reflected in how young motherhood is framed as a 'problem' either by their status as unmarried women or as a consequence of their age. I will then provide a section on intersectionality as a theory and the relevance within my research. The final section of this chapter will provide a discussion on stigma, mainly drawing on the work of Irving Goffman and consider the relevance of stigma to the lives of young lone mothers.

Chapter Three: In this chapter, I will examine the policies affecting mothers as women, lone mothers, young people, young mothers and of being part of the welfare class. This is divided into three sections. The first will explore social security and other welfare rated support with a focus on changes since 2010 and the impact on this group of women. The second part will consider employment and education – two potential routes out of poverty for young lone mothers and how recent changes in policy have impacted these routes. The final part of this chapter will look at reductions to front line services including services provided by the state such as children's centres and those provided by charities such as domestic violence services.

Chapter Four: This chapter focuses on the methodology underpinning my research. The first part will be concerned with epistemological considerations of the research and how I utilised intersectionality as a methodology and how I incorporated Goffman's approach to stigma. I will also discuss the practical implications of my research design including decisions around sampling, data reliability, and research

rigour. There will also be discussion on the analysis of my data including the use of triangulation within the analysis and the use of NVivo.

Chapter Five: This will be the first of three analytical chapters. I will focus on identity construction and stigma for young lone mothers by considering each identified status separately and exploring participants' interpretation of these. I will then consider Irving Goffman's approach to stigma and apply this approach to young lone motherhood.

Chapter Six: This chapter focuses on participants' experiences of housing, finances including welfare benefits and employment and education. I will also consider how certain polices impact on the lives of these young women and how they negotiate these. Within this chapter I will also consider key policy changes such as the introduction of Universal Credit (UC).

Chapter Seven: This chapter will present a discussion of the forms of formal and informal support that young mothers draw on. These will cover financial support such as child maintenance and the social fund. I will also look at non-financial support such as support within education and front-line services such as groups for young mothers at children's centres. I will further explore some of the implications of these findings drawing on the current policy context and austerity and consider how reductions in local council funding are impacting on the services young mothers receive.

Chapter Eight: This final chapter will bring together the main findings of my research and consider its contribution to social policy. Building on my findings, I will also include policy recommendations, and identify future research opportunities.

Chapter Two

The Precarious Lives of Young Lone Mothers: Understanding Intersecting Oppressions and Identity Construction

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the theoretical arguments that underpin my research. In western culture motherhood is constructed in a particular way. Traditional images of good motherhood are often concerned with women who are heterosexual, white, child focused and financially dependent on their 'male' partners (Johnston and Swanson, 2006). There are also clear social expectations where a woman is anticipated to be in her 30's or 40's before she starts having children (Wilson and Huntington, 2005). Mothers who do not conform to these traditional expectations often find themselves marginalized by society, and practicing outside the boundaries of 'normal' motherhood (McDermot and Graham, 2005). In this chapter I will consider how young lone mothers are constructed within medical, moral and economic discourses. These young women are often seen as leading chaotic lifestyles characterised by worklessness, welfare dependency and a rejection of social norms that centre around the nuclear family and the pursuit of a career before having children. Young mothers are, according to Silva, presented as 'the epitome of the problematic mother' (1996, P.8). This image of the young lone mother has created marginalised identities for them as a group, anchored in deep embedded stigmas associated with gender and social class. In this chapter I will also explore how policy has constructed and responded to young lone motherhood since 1980, and the implications of this for young lone mothers. To enable me to understand young lone mothers' experience, I will also provide the theoretical approach of intersectionality and consider the work of Irving Goffman (1990a and 1990b) and his theory of stigma and performance management and its relevance to this research.

2.2 Constructing and Deconstructing Young Lone Motherhood

In the first part of this chapter, I will consider how young lone mothers are constructed within societal discourses and how their age, gender, lone motherhood and social class statuses impact on the negative perceptions of them. This section will also challenge traditional discourses around young lone motherhood through key literature and young mothers' own attitudes towards themselves as parents.

Societal discourses of youthful motherhood are of women who are dependent on welfare (Campion, 1995), inadequate carers for their children (MacVarish and Billings, 2010), and deviant young people willfully avoiding the labour market for a life on benefits (Dharmrait, 2014). According to Baker (2009), young mothers are perceived to have failed to make the 'right' choices by focusing more on intimate relationships than on economic security and marriage. According to Wallbank (2001) the stigma experienced by young mothers is a consequence of the embedded cultural beliefs of young mothers as problematic and is a status that contradicts traditional views of adolescence (Whitehead, 2001). Indeed, Neoliberal discourses of youth in Western cultures focus on the importance of education and the need for young women to be engaged in the labour market (McRobbie, 2007). Young mothers are subject to criticism because they do not follow the traditional 'socially acceptable' life course of a career, marriage and then children (Baxter et al. 2013).

2.2.1 Young Mothers and Disadvantage: A consequence of youth?

A variety of research suggests young mothers are likely to experience social and economic disadvantage. This group of women is less likely to have access to adequate housing (Fletcher et al, 2013) and are more likely to experience poor health (Witvliet et al. 2014). They are likely to experience conflict within their families (Vary, 2001) and report higher rates of depression and lower levels of wellbeing than older mothers (Liao, 2003). A report published by the DWP (2006) estimated that only 30 per cent of women who became mothers as teenagers were in education,

employment or training.[13] A more recent analysis by the Local Government Association (LGA) conducted in 2018 suggests that 21 per cent of the total number of NEET[14] young people aged 16-18 are young mothers. Other evidence suggests the disadvantage that teenage mothers experience is not just confined to their youth. Young mothers are less likely than their peers to leave school with qualifications (Wiggins et al. 2005), and are significantly less likely to go to university (Action for Children, 2017). They are likely to be lone mothers while their children are growing up (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999; Duncan, 2007), and are unlikely to be married or cohabiting with a partner by the time they are in their 30s and 40s (Ermisch, 2003). Not having qualifications impedes on lone mothers' ability to engage in paid work with less than 40 per cent of lone mothers who have no qualifications engaged in the labour market (Rabindrakumar, 2018). Even when they do find paid work this is likely to be low-paid with little opportunity for progression (D'Arcy and Hurrell, 2014). Adult poverty is also much more common amongst young lone mothers. Women who give birth to their first child as a teenager are more likely to experience poverty at the age of 30 compared to women who gave birth to their first child over the age of 24 (LGA, 2018). Their low income means that they are also less likely to have financial security when they are older and are very unlikely to become homeowners (Wellings et al. 2001).

While these studies portray a harsh reality for young lone mothers, we cannot conclude from these that their age is the cause of these outcomes. Most research looking at the outcomes of young mothers is done so after they become parents, meaning we do not know about their situation and access to material resources pre-pregnancy. Research has generally found young mothers are more likely to experience material disadvantage before becoming pregnant. Young mothers are likely to have experienced poverty as children (Allen et al. 2007), and to have grown up in areas characterised by social deprivation (Wellings et al. 1999). Poor educational outcomes and truancy from school have also been identified among young mothers

[13] Beyond the compulsory school leaving age.
[14] Not in Education, Employment or Training.

(Kiernan, 1997). Overall, studies looking at factors influencing youthful pregnancy and motherhood have generally reported similar findings; linking young parenthood with socio-economic disadvantage and low educational aspirations (Corlyon and Stock, 2013). Other research looking at teenage pregnancy throughout Europe also found that young mothers had low educational attainment and low educational aspirations (Imamura et al. 2007). These studies suggest mothers were already subject to material hardships and difficulties within education well before pregnancy and these are likely therefore to be a consequence of intergenerational impacts rather than the age these women gave birth.

As a consequence of their material disadvantage, even before they become pregnant, young mothers are labelled the 'wrong sort of girl' (Kelly, 1996, P.422). Their disadvantaged backgrounds coupled with other 'undesirable' characteristics such as lack of academic success result in them being seen as heading away from a desirable life course. Those who label them in this way will argue it was no surprise they were irresponsible and became pregnant before marriage or establishing stable employment. According to Harris (2004) girls have emerged as the new model of ideal citizenship. With their potential for academic success and higher education, young women have become a highly valued addition to the economy. However, if they have children while still in their youth they risk being framed as undesirable citizens who depend on welfare.

When young women become mothers, it is assumed they are rejecting education and labour market participation. However, research with young mothers would suggest having a child has the opposite effect – with their status as mothers encouraging them to go back to education or engage in paid work (Duncan, 2007). Furthermore, a systematic review looking at the long-term socio-economic outcomes of young mothers has found that the age of becoming a mother is almost negligible in its effect (Squires et al. 2012). The main critique of outcome-based research with young mothers is that the lives of these women are only explored once they become parents. Consequently, we cannot predict whether or not they would have been more successful in education and the labour market had they not had children at a young

age. It is very difficult to separate this life event from others because we cannot conclusively predict what will happen to people throughout their life course. Ermisch and Pevalin (2003) have however, attempted to do this using longitudinal data collected from the 1970 British Cohort Study. They selected two groups of women aged 30: one group who had become mothers as teenagers and the other group who had become pregnant as teenagers but had miscarried. They found no differences at all between the educational attainments, job level or earnings between the two groups. Other research by Robson and Pevalin (2007) also looked at the outcomes at age 30 for women who had become teenage mothers and those who had miscarried as teenagers. They found no difference between both groups in terms of educational attainment, home ownership, the claiming of welfare benefits, labour market participation, and wage levels. This suggests that the outcomes are not linked to teenage motherhood but instead reflect other possible influences such as material deprivation. Another review by Hawkes (2010) using data from the Millennium Cohort Study, looked at the health and educational outcomes of the children of young mothers. Hawkes found after taking early deprivation into account, the only negative outcome identified was higher levels of hyperactivity amongst the children of young mothers. These studies suggest outcomes associated with youthful mothering are more likely to be associated with pre-pregnancy material and social disadvantage rather than their age. Findings from these systematic reviews suggest it is the material resources women have before becoming mothers that is the most important factor in socio-economic outcomes. Further support for this line of argument comes from a systematic review by Cooper and Stewart (2013) who found financial resources within a household are the most important factor when looking at childhood outcomes.

Young mothers often find themselves in a difficult situation – forced to choose between being a 'good' citizen or a 'good' mother. As good citizenship is often associated with paid work (Patrick, 2012) young lone mothers will be defined as 'bad' citizens because of their absence from or restricted participation in the labour market. If young mothers fail to meet the expectation of paid work, they become subject to welfare related stigma. The stigma attached to claiming benefits in the UK is well documented (Breese, 2011) with those seen as undeserving assigned a

'devalued social identity' (Baumberg, 2016, P.183). This type of stigma has increased as a consequence of austerity and welfare reform with those accessing state support put under greater scrutiny. According to Tyler (2020) this growing stigma has been purposely created by anti-welfare politicians as a way to justify welfare retrenchment. Through a carefully constructed rhetoric (reinforced by journalists and spread to the public according to Tyler) those who are claiming benefits are assumed to be a drain on public resources and underserving of support. Neither lone nor young mothers are seen to be deserving (see Bendictis, 2012; Anwar and Stainstreet, 2015). Equally they may be assumed to be inadequate mothers if they choose to continue with their education and seek employment over full time child rearing. Young lone mothers therefore find themselves stigmatised regardless of whether they engage in paid employment to reduce their need for welfare related support or stay at home with their children. Ultimately, young lone mothers find themselves torn between the stigma of being dependent on benefits or of being perceived as absent and uncaring mothers.

2.2.2 A Cause for Concern? Youthful Motherhood in Public Health Literature

In addition to the stigma associated with their socio-economic status the construction of teenage pregnancy and parenthood as problematic is illustrated in a variety of public health literatures. Traditional constructions of the good mothering behaviour is deeply embedded within medical and health related literature. Within medical journals, teenage pregnancy and young motherhood are presented as dangerous conditions for both mothers and their children; a problem in desperate need of intervention. For example, an article by Langille (2007) focuses on the negative outcomes of teenage motherhood and encourages health professionals to understand the sexual activity of young people in order to prevent pregnancies. In their article aimed at medical professionals, Cook and Cameron (2017) identify a number of social consequences of youth pregnancy and motherhood including unemployment. This presentation to medical professionals means responses to the care needs for young mothers already reflect 'professional' advice that frames their position as problematic. Not surprisingly, young mothers report feeling judged by

medical professionals and have raised concerns over the treatment decisions made in response to their age (see De Jonge, 2001; Brady et al. 2008; Redwood et al. 2012). Breheny and Stevens (2007) on interviewing doctors, nurses and midwives found they viewed young women as inadequate to become mothers because they had adolescent traits such as being self-centered and naïve. The researchers also found these health professionals had rigid definitions around 'good' motherhood that young mothers could not meet. There is also research to suggest medical professionals adopt particular behaviours and treatment approaches towards young mothers as a consequence of this stereotyping. For example, Fessler (2008) explored the attitudes of professionals towards pregnant teenagers and found that a doctor had once denied a young woman an epidural believing that the pain experienced during childbirth would discourage her from having any more. This type of negative treatment ensures teenage mothers know they are different to other mothers. If this discriminatory practice is entrenched within the pregnancy and maternal care provided to young mothers, it could affect the support they receive.

There is some evidence to suggest young mothers and their children are more at risk of negative health outcomes. Research suggests teenage mothers are more likely to suffer from long-term mental health problems (Department for Education and Skills[15], 2004), and more likely to experience poor physical health into adulthood (Berrington et al. 2005). Other research has found young mothers are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviours when pregnant such as smoking tobacco and are less likely to breastfeed (McAndrew et al. 2010). Research also suggests their children have lower birth weights (Chen et al. 2007). These outcomes can, according to mainstream medical literature, be attributed to the fact that the mothers are young (Skinner and Marino, 2016.)

Teenage pregnancy and motherhood tend to be presented as a public health concern by both health care practitioners and policy makers who argue that the age of the mother is the cause of these outcomes (Cook and Cameron, 2017; SEU, 1999).

[15] This department was dissolved in 2007.

However, findings presented in medical literature and policy documents fail to present an accurate portrayal regarding the health outcomes of teenage mothers and their children. There are three main issues with the current position on health, youth and young mothers. Firstly, there is other research that suggests having a child under 20 can have positive health impacts. When comparing obstetrics outcomes amongst young and older mothers, it is often the former who have better health outcomes. For example, young mothers are less likely to have maternal and perinatal morbidly issues such as high blood pressure and are less likely to need emergency intervention such as a cesarean section when giving birth (Jolly et al. 2000). Evidence has also linked young motherhood to a reduced risk of breast cancer (MacMahon et al. 1970; McPherson et al. 2000). There are also positive health outcomes for children such as a reduced risk of diabetes (Bingley et al. 2000). According to Daguerre and Nativel (2006), women over 35 have far greater health risks associated with delayed childbearing.

Despite this evidence, older mothers have not been labeled a concern for public health in the same way young mothers have. This is likely because they do not have identities laden with stigma and prejudice, and are assumed to be more financially stable, married and less likely to depend on welfare to support their children. The second critique is regarding the inconsistencies in findings. According to Arai (2009) while research often finds negative health outcomes amongst young mothers, the extent of these outcomes and the differences when compared to older mothers varies considerably. This suggests there are likely to be other factors influencing the outcomes aside from age. Indeed, the final critique of the health-related literature is the difficultly in isolating age as the contributing factor. A review of evidence by Shaw et al. (2006) found that when accounting for background, material deprivation is a far better indicator of childhood outcomes. They further found that after deprivation was taken into account, the only notable difference was children of young mothers tended to have more dental fillings than children of older mothers. Other negative outcomes associated with youthful mothering such as infant mortality has been linked much more closely with poverty (Taylor-Robinson et al. 2019). Infant mortality has been increasing in the UK in recent years and concerns have been raised about

welfare reform with falling family incomes being seen as the cause of the increase (Vize, 2018). Research also suggests health behaviours such as breastfeeding amongst young mothers are associated with access to support. Hunter et al. (2015) argue support for breastfeeding is catered around the needs of middle-class women and consequently young mothers find the support difficult to navigate and engage with. This suggests it is not their age that influences whether they will breastfeed or not but rather young mothers' lack access to services that meet their needs.

2.2.3 Gendered Expectations of 'Good' Motherhood

Much of the stigma young mothers experience is associated with cultural expectations of perceived notions of 'good' motherhood and how far they deviate from these expectations. According to Silva (1996), because the family as a unit has existed throughout most of history, it is often falsely assumed that motherhood is a natural condition. The reality, however, is that the institution of motherhood is a social construct that incorporates ideas about what motherhood means and how women, once they become mothers, should behave. According to Macleod (2001) motherhood is perceived as being innate within all women but when and in what circumstances women should become mothers is socially constructed. Currently, the anchors of this social construction include financial stability and a committed relationship ideally characterised by marriage (Cain, 2016). However, young motherhood is associated with the rejection of fathers (Wallbank, 2001) and the rejection of education (Bullen and Kenway, 2005). Thus, young lone mothers are far removed from the current expectations. Consequently, these young women are seen as deviant because they actively choose to parent alone and by avoiding education are reducing their chances of financial stability. Wilson and Huntington (2005) use the example of young motherhood to illustrate how ideas of gender reflect the imperatives of time and culture. They argue that in the late 20th century two important changes occurred: first, attitudes towards women working changed to reflect the need for them to enter the labour market, and second, fertility techniques improved. With these changes, women were then expected to wait until they were in their 30s or 40s before having children. The legacy of these changes remains today

with older mothers being seen to be doing the 'right' thing with regards to fertility and employment, and young mothers being seen to deviate from the norm.

To correspond to good mothering practices, women must engage in socially acceptable behaviours that vary over time and place. For example, breastfeeding is considered the ideal way for mothers to feed their baby (Shaw, 2007) and they must pursue this even when it is painful or distressing (Pederson, 2016). While all mothers have to meet these expectations of 'good' motherhood, there is more pressure for young lone mothers because they are so far removed from the concept of the 'good' mother. According to DiLipa (1989), there is a hierarchy of motherhood in western cultures. Young mothers as well as lesbian, disabled and non-biological mothers often find themselves placed at the bottom of this hierarchy (Bailey et al. 2002). Being the subordinate group within this highly valued institution means young women find themselves practicing outside the boundaries of normal motherhood (McDermot and Graham, 2005). Mothering outside of these boundaries leads to unique experiences for this group of women that differ from 'socially acceptable' mothers who are financially stable, older and married.

Perceptions of youthful parenting are highly gendered and young men face far less surveillance in terms of reproductive rights and are not subject to the same scrutiny as their female peers. The different perceptions of young women and young men are entrenched within ideas about youthful male and female sexuality. According to Clarke (2006) once children enter into adolescence they are seen as having individual agency and must take personal responsibility for their actions. However, this appears to apply more to women than men where sexual activity and conception is concerned. Hollway (1994) has applied the Male Sex Drive concept[16] to young motherhood. She argues that men are assumed to have biological sexual desires that are out of their control, and as such cannot be blamed for their promiscuity. These desires are not natural for women however, and as such they are expected to show

[16] This idea refers to the gendered biological differences in sexual desires between men and women with men considered to have a higher libido than women.

more restraint. Thus, youthful sexual activity is blamed on women's inability to say 'no' to men who have little control over their actions. The notion of sexual activity amongst young people is open to much scrutiny but when a child is conceived, young women are subject to more chastising. The individual agency as put forward by Clarke (2006) above also encompasses reproductive rights and pregnancy protection strategies for which women are seen to be responsible (Pearson, 2003). When young women fail to take appropriate protection, their engagement in sexual activity becomes visible through their pregnant teenage body, and this then leads to them being treated with shame and stigma (Fine and McClelland, 2006). Young women are criticised for being 'weak willed' (Ellis-Sloan, 2014, P.2), and the 'stupid slut' discourse is applied (Shaw, 2010, P.59). Young women are labeled as 'sluts' for engaging in sexual activity and 'stupid' for 'allowing' themselves to become pregnant. This approach to understanding youthful motherhood highlights the gendered differences between men and women in terms of sexual activity and responsibility with young women held to a much higher standard of expected behaviour.

These expectations of motherhood compared to fatherhood may be due in part to the visibility of mothers, with all aspects of their lives including working and socialising often revolving around the needs of their children (Hays, 1998). Fathers, particularly non-resident ones, may be exposed to far less attention and scrutiny because they are less visible (Doucet, 2013). According to Osborn (2015), young fathers as a group are often excluded from service provision meaning their social interactions are limited. As well as visibility in public life, youthful mothering also dominates academic literature and policy with youthful fathering receiving far less attention (Davies and Neale, 2015). According to Kidger (2004), policy documents produced from 1999 started by using gender-neutral language but by the early 2000's terms such as 'teenage parents' had been replaced with 'teenage mothers.' Academic research looking at young mothers and young fathers has also tended to take a gender-based approach with only a handful of studies incorporating both young mothers and fathers (see Alexander et al. 2007 for example). Most research with young mothers has tended to focus on the stigma attached to their age (Yardley, 2008; Smith-Battle, 2013), and how they manage this stigma (Elis-Sloan, 2014; Wenham, 2016). There is

considerable overlap between some of the findings from research looking at young mothers or young fathers. For example, Middleton (2011) found young mothers highly valued their status as mothers and similar responses were found with young fathers (Neale et al. 2015). Research also indicates that both young mothers (Anwar and Stanistreet, 2015) and young fathers (Neale and Davies, 2016) strive to financially support their children. Despite a greater focus on young fathers in recent years, research and policy discussions remain overwhelming focused on young mothers rendering them more vulnerable to stigma and social scrutiny.

In addition to stigmatised identities relating to their youth, gender and material resources young lone mothers are also subject to stigma associated with lone parenthood. This type of stigma is well entrenched in society and various social institutions such as those associated with religion, policy and the media. Indeed, the patriarchal nuclear family as an ideal has proved to be a strong concept despite the increased diversity of families over the past fifty years (Walsh and Mason, 2018). As explored in the previous section, young mothers are often perceived as rejecting the father and actively choosing to parent alone. However, when we look at data concerning birth registration, we find that 80 per cent of mothers under the age of 20 and 90 per cent of mothers aged 20-24 register the birth jointly with the father (ONS, 2014b). While this is not conclusive that parents are in a relationship and does not ensure they will remain together in the future, it suggests that the majority of young mothers have contact with the father shortly after the birth. Despite most young couples registering births together, young mothers are still more likely to be lone mothers than older mothers and are also less likely to have ever been married to the father of the child (Duncan, 2007). According to Walbank (2001) young lone mothers are blamed regardless of the reasons for the relationship breakdown. It is their fault that their children have to grow up outside of a nuclear family and without a male role model. However, research by Portier-Le Conq (2017) found it was often the father of the child who ended the relationship or the relationship had ended due to violence or drug taking by the father and that young mothers are seldom lone mothers by choice. However, research with young fathers has also found they value their status as parents and seek to spend time with and support their children (Neale

et al. 2016). Thus, even if young parents separate, they may still be parenting together.

Youthful motherhood is also challenged through the voices of young mothers themselves. Middleton (2011) took a narrative approach to interviewing teenage mothers. She found that becoming a parent offered a new life for women who had experienced poverty, inadequate parenting, adversity and sometimes emotional or sexual abuse. Research by Anwar and Stanistreet (2015) found young mothers deeply valued their social status as mothers and argued it had encouraged them to pursue other opportunities such as education and paid work. Other research by Clarke (2015) also found that having a child had inspired young mothers to focus on their career aspirations as a way to provide for their children. Seamark and Lings (2004) found young mothers deeply valued their status as parents in the same way older mothers did, and also argued that the birth of their child had led them to consider going back to education. These studies suggest that despite the stigma attached to their status, young mothers value their role as caring mothers. Furthermore, having a child encourages them to engage in behaviours such as education and paid work. Valuing motherhood as well as education and paid work are characteristics associated with being a 'good' citizen and a 'good' mother.

This section has considered how young lone motherhood is constructed within current discourses. They are portrayed as willful deviants who reject marriage and stable employment and have children to access state support. Despite the negative perceptions of youthful parenthood, it is young women rather than young men who are subject to far greater scrutiny when sexual activity and subsequent pregnancy is considered. As lone mothers, these young women are perceived as deliberately deviating from the traditional nuclear family. However, most young mothers register the birth of their child with the father and being a lone parent is not usually seen as desirable to them. As lone mothers, these young women are more likely to be claiming social security benefits meaning they are also subject to negative perceptions based on their perceived welfare dependency. Despite the negative rhetoric around young lone motherhood, this is challenged by research with young

mothers who deeply value their status as parents and seek out education and paid work to provide for their children.

While there is some evidence to suggest young mothers are subject to negative health and socio-economic outcomes other research has challenged this with evidence suggesting these outcomes appear to be associated with disadvantage that was present pre-pregnancy. When we consider the material resources of the mothers before their pregnancies, evidence suggests having a child as a teenager does not impact on their own or their children's long-term outcomes. Despite this evidence, policy has viewed youthful motherhood negatively with it being a target for intervention since 1980. In the next section of this chapter I will explore how policy has constructed and responded to youthful motherhood.

2.3 The Construction of the Young Lone Motherhood 'Problem:' Policy Perspectives

The next section will focus on how policy makers construct youthful mothering and how each of the social statuses identified for this research have influenced policy responses. It is important to note at this stage, policy directed at young mothers has tended to focus on women under 18 – rather than up to 25. According to Gordon (1997) policy makers have been interested in young motherhood since the late 1970's. It was around this time that changes in the family began to come to the attention of policy makers with declining marriage and increasing divorces rates coupled with an increase in lone parent families (ONS, 2011b; Beaumont, 2011). This section is divided into three parts. The first focuses on the period between 1979 and 1997. The consecutive Conservative Governments within this period were concerned with the changing demographics of the family, particularly the increase in the number of never-married, lone mothers and teenage mothers. Their agenda ensured that a moral panic around lone parents was created with young mothers being labeled as 'bad mothers' who were very costly to the public purse. Perceptions around young motherhood at this time tended to raise concerns about unmarried mothers and it was their marital status rather than their age that became a concern for policy makers. When a Labour Government was elected in 1997, this marked a turning point

in the construction of young motherhood with age becoming the defining challenge as opposed to whether or not the young mother was parenting alone. The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy was introduced in 1999 where the main focus was on reducing conception rates of women under the age of 18 as well as improving the outcomes for young mothers under the age of 20 and their children. This is the focus of the second part. The final part is concerned with policy post 2010. With falling conception rates, the teenage pregnancy problem has assumed to have been 'solved' and young mothers as a group have almost disappeared from the policy agenda. Instead, they appear to have been absorbed back into the 'lone mother' group and targeted, in policy terms, through the new Troubled Families Programme.

2.3.1 Vilifying Young Mothers: The rise of the never married lone mothers

During the 1970's and 1980's the number of couples cohabiting had increased substantially making it more difficult for supporters of the nuclear family to be critical of their life choices (Vinovskis, 2003). Thus suddenly, the never married lone mother became the focal point of policy concern and the ultimate threat to the nuclear family. However, for the consecutive Conservative Governments in power between 1979 and 1997, young motherhood was framed as a problem according to marital status, rather than an issue of age (Aria, 2009). During their time in office Conservative Governments promoted New Right discourses characterised by the perceived decline of the nuclear family and concern around welfare dependency amongst never married lone mothers. New Right theorists such as Roger Scruton (1986), Patricia Morgan (2007) and Ferdinand Mount (1982) were concerned with traditional models of the family and gender roles. Charles Murray (1990) and his argument on the development of an underclass in the UK were particularly influential. According to Murray the development of an underclass was linked to the decline in marriage and the increase of never married lone mothers who claimed benefits. The underclass was characterised by worklessness, benefit dependency and deviant behaviours such a crime. Consequently, during the 1980's and early 1990's, lone mothers were portrayed as irresponsible transgressors who were 'causing' the decline of the highly valued nuclear family. Lone mothers were presented as willful deviants

choosing not to be in relationship with the father of their child, and using their child to access council housing and drain public resources (Walbank, 2001).

Evidence taken from speeches made by MPs at the time suggests that they had particular views of lone mothers and regularly stigmatised them. John Redwood, the Secretary of State for Wales from 1993 to 1995 amongst many other roles, was often critical of lone mothers, arguing in 1993 that the Government must 'emphasise our belief that the traditional two-parent family is best. Best for the parents, best for society and above all best for the children' (cited in Pascall, 1997:293). There was also concern regarding the perceived dependence of welfare as promoting lone motherhood. In 1995 proposals were put forward to deny social security benefits to lone mothers who 'could not produce a marriage certificate' (Walbank, 2001, P.40). While this was never introduced into legislation, it highlights the policy distinction between the divorced (or separated) and the never married (assumed to be young) lone mother.

As the problem was framed in terms lone rather than youthful motherhood, policy makers responded by targeting lone mothers. The benefits received by lone mothers including child benefit and lone parent benefit was subject to numerous freezes between 1979 and 1990. The Social Security Act of 1986 established the Social Fund. Administered by the Department for Health and Social Services this fund was based on eligibility and need. One off grants that were given to families were replaced with a series of loans that would be paid back through deductions from their benefit (Evans et al. 1994). Within the same Act, means tested benefit levels for those aged between 18-25 were reduced and paid at a lesser rate. While this change did not apply to lone parents, it devalued the position of young people who were increasingly subject to strict rules of eligibility including attending pre-designed training courses which critics argue did little to improve the opportunities for them (Worley, 2011). Furthermore, with a reduction in these benefits, young people would have likely become more reliant on their family to meet the shortfall in this reduction. The 1988 Social Security Act brought an end to the disregard of childcare and other work-related expenses, replacing it with a flat rate of £15. This made many lone parents

worse off in paid employment. In the same year, the Education Reform Act was passed that limited the number of children who were entitled to free school meals. Parents were also increasingly required to buy course handbooks for lessons and pay for school trips which added yet another financial burden. Millar (1994) argues that in 1979, average lone parent incomes were equivalent to about 57 per cent of the income of a couple with 2 children. However, as a consequence of these policy changes, by 1989 this had been reduced to around 40 per cent (cited in Chant, 1997).

In 1992, at the Conservative Party conference, teenage mothers were referenced by the then Minister for Social Security Peter Lilly in his speech on welfare dependency. He argued 'you've got young ladies who get pregnant just to jump the housing queue' (Jascow0, 2011). This reflected Government concerns that young single mothers were being prioritised in the allocation of social housing. In response to this, the Housing Act 1996 repealed part of the Homeless Person's Act 1977 that had given priority to lone mothers seeking council housing. While it affected all lone mothers, policy makers focused on targeting young lone mothers. In 1995 George Young (the Housing Minster at the time) stated with regards to the proposed changes: 'How do we explain to the young couple who want to wait for a home before they start a family that they cannot be re-housed ahead of the unmarried teenager?' (cited in Wallbank, 2001, P.55).

In 1992 the Heath of the Nation Report was published by the Department of Health (1992). Within the report concerns were raised about sexual activity amongst young people under 16 and the associated risk of sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. The same report also proposed the target of reducing teenage pregnancies. While this arguably marked a policy turning point in how youthful mothering was framed (from being a problematic lone mother to a problematic young mother) it wasn't until a change in Government in 1997 that age became the focal point in policy terms of defining young motherhood.

2.3.2 From 'Villains' to 'Vulnerable:' Reframing Young Lone Motherhood

When the Labour Party took office in 1997, they developed a new approach to teenage pregnancy. According to Macvarish and Billings (2010), the issue of the mother's age and youthful parenting itself became a cause for concern rather than her marital status. Furthermore, while youthful parenting was still seen as problematic, young mothers were treated as vulnerable citizens at risk of social exclusion and policy intervention was seen as necessary to support them.
In 1999, a report on Teenage Pregnancy was published by the newly created Social Exclusion Unit[17] (SEU), a department created to conduct research and make recommendations on groups who were considered to be 'socially excluded.' The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (TPS) was published in 1999 (SEU, 1999) which according to Aria (2009), had two main aims. The first aim was to reduce the conception rate among women under the age of 18 by 50 per cent. The second aim was to reduce social exclusion amongst young parents under the age of 20 by improving access to education and employment.

To achieve the first aim, the government developed guidance for local authorities on introducing initiatives such as providing sex and relationship education in schools, setting up school and college based sexual health services, and promoting the confidentiality of sexual health services (Hadley et al. 2016). In 2018, the ONS reported the lowest level of conception rates for under-18-year-olds since comparable statistics were first recorded in 1969. The TPS is generally considered highly successful in terms of reducing teenage pregnancy rates (Skinner and Marino, 2016; Skinner, 2016) and has generated interest from the World Health Organisation (Weale, 2016).

To address the second aim of the strategy, policy targeted three main areas: education, housing and support through the Sure Start Plus programme. In terms of education, this was seen as key to reducing social excision and ensuring young mothers remained in school after giving birth. Furthermore, it represented an

[17] This unit merged with the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit in 2006 to become the Social Exclusion Task Force.

example of Labour's 'social investment state' (Lister, 2010, P.49) because the Government invested in economically activating young mothers rather than increasing their access to additional social security benefits. One of the main barriers identified in terms of education was childcare and therefore the Care to Learn Grant (CLG) was launched in 2004. The CLG provides funding for childcare costs of up to £160[18] per child per week for mothers under the age of 20[19] who undertake certain educational courses (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2018). Research by Riley et al. (2010), found that while the take up of the grant amongst mothers is relatively low, the young mothers who do so tended to have positive outcomes with around 75 per cent of those in receipt of the grant gaining a qualification. As there is a low take up rate, this suggests there are additional barriers for young lone mother in terms of education. As identified in the previous section young motherhood has been associated with having low educational attainment and low educational aspirations meaning they are likely to already feel marginalised from institutions such as schools and colleges. This suggests simply providing subsidised childcare is not enough to commit young mothers to education. Indeed Harden et al. (2006) argue that intervention through the TPS did not consider issues such as poverty and the lack of opportunities for some young women. Furthermore, research suggests that while many young mothers want to work towards qualifications (Dunacn, 2007), others want to prioritise full time-care (Smith-Bowers, 2002), at least in the short-term. Research by Dench et al. (2007), found young mothers often want to return to education once their children start school. By this time, however, young mothers are unlikely to qualify for the CLG because only women under 20 can claim. Finally, there is some research to suggest that despite central Government's commitment, local authorities did not always prioritise the schooling of young mothers. Lall (2007) found young pregnant women and mothers continued to be expelled from school as a consequence of their pregnancy despite Labour's approach to education.

[18] Up to £175 per week in London.
[19] Young mothers must be under 20 when they start their course to qualify.

Housing was another key area of policy developed for young mothers. One of the aims within the TPS was to withdraw tenancy offers of social housing and instead all young mothers should remain at home with their own parents. In cases where this was not possible, these mothers should be places in supervised, shared accommodation with other young parents. This would, according to the TPS, help them to develop good parenting skills and help them to engage in positive behaviours such as remaining or returning to education. The housing aspect of the TPS was complemented by a report by the Department for the Environment, Transport and Regions[20] (DETR) titled 'Supporting People: Policy into Practice' in 2001. This report set out policy aims to improve access to supported housing for certain groups of citizens with young mothers being identified as a group in need of this type of accommodation. Financial support was given through the Supported Housing Management Grant[21] to local authorities who were required to provide targeted housing for teenage mothers[22]. Additionally, young mothers living in social housing were required to apply for housing benefit which would also cover some of the costs (Hinton and Gorton, 2001). In 2008, developments within the Government's child poverty related policy led to changes in supported housing for young mothers. The Child Poverty Unit which was set up in 2007 established and funded nine Child Poverty Pilots with the aim of supporting the Government to eradicate child poverty by 2020 and to improve the outcomes for disadvantaged families and their children (Evans and Gardiner, 2011). One of these pilots was the Teenage Parent Supported Housing (TPSH) pilot. Launched in 2009 with specific allocated funding, seven local authorities were asked to develop enhanced support packages such as help with budgeting and parenting classes for young mothers that also included floating housing support for young mothers not living in supported hosing (Johnson and Quiligars, 2010).

[20] This department was dissolved and replaced in 2001.
[21] This was replaced in 2003 with the Supporting People Grant that consolidated a number of local authority funding streams.
[22] As part of the grant local authorities ware also required to target care leavers and young people under 18 who had no support from their family (DETR, 2001).

Giullari and Shaw (2005) have been highly critical of the approach to housing advocated by the TPS. They argue this approach restricts the independence and autonomy of young mothers by not giving them access to their own home and forcing them to engage in support when they are placed in supported accommodation. Policy makers also make assumptions about the family of young mothers when making decisions on housing provision. According to Giullari and Shaw, the Labour Government made assumptions about the role of grandparents and the level of support they can provide. Indeed, having a non-dependent and her children in the family home could lead to financial hardships for grandparents (Phoenix, 1991). Finally, the supported hosing provided for young mothers was not designed to allow fathers to live on site meaning young coupled parents would be separated with little control over when and where they can spend time together. The housing support for teenage mothers also arguably reflects some of the New Right rhetoric of the previous Conservative governments because i) it prevented young mothers accessing social housing, ii) it used the support given by housing providers to promote parenting classes and thus assuming young mothers did not know how to parent and iii) it used the same support to encourage them into education and reduce the time they spent on benefits.

The final key area of policy developed for young mothers as part of the TPS was the Sure Start Plus (SSP) programme. The SSP was part of the wider Sure Start programme that aimed to provide local support to disadvantaged families. The Department for Education and Skills (2000) set out four aims of the SSP and associated targets such as reducing smoking amongst young mothers, increasing the contact mothers have with health professionals and to increase the percentage of teenage mothers participating in education. According to Austerberry and Wiggins (2007) the purpose of SSP was to reduce social exclusion amongst young mothers by encouraging them to engage in education and training and to improve long-term health and social outcomes of both them and their children by giving them access to community-based services. These services were funded via a Sure Start Plus Grant which was given to 35 local authorities chosen because teenage pregnancy rates as well as deprivation were high in these areas (Wiggins et al. 2005).

Despite methodological difficulties concerned with engaging service users in the evaluation (see Williams and Wilson, 2005 for example), at a local level, a national evaluation found some positive outcomes. This evaluation by Wiggins et al. (2005) reported the SSP supported young mothers with a variety of issues including: domestic violence, identifying mental health problems, and proving practical and emotional support. They also found young mothers were generally satisfied with the services they received. Furthermore, a comparative analysis found that in areas that had an SSP presence, more young mothers were in education or training[23].
Despite the success of the SSP, in 2003, the Government announced they were reforming the Sure Start programme with a focus on making the service universal rather than targeted at disadvantaged communities (Lewis, 2011). According to Lewis (2010) the Government instead established children's centres throughout the country with the overall aim to integrate childcare services and early learning and to promote adult employment. While services were mainstreamed local authorities could continue to respond to local need by providing additional services such as groups foryoung mothers (Bouchal and Norris, 2010). Thus, while not part of the central government agenda, some local authorities continued to support young mothers.

This section has set out policy responses to young motherhood between 1999 and 2010. During this period, young mothers were targeted through policy based on their age with a number of approaches aimed at reducing their social exclusion and improving the life chances for both themselves and their children. Young mothers were seen as a vulnerable group of women who required intervention and support. Since 2010, the withdrawal of the TPS has meant age has ceased to be the focus of intervention with young lone mothers. This will be explored in the next section.

2.3.3 From 'Vulnerable' to 'Troubled:' Young Lone Motherhood in an Age of Austerity

[23] However, there were no differences in the number of young mothers in employment.

When coming to office in 2010, the Coalition Government decided not to continue with the TPS. The Teenage Pregnancy Independent Advisory Group (2010) reported that while funding for preventing teenage pregnancy and support for young parents would be reduced, the government had committed to retain the CLG and had ring-fenced funding to address young pregnancies. Despite discontinuing the TPS, the Coalition Government argued that reducing teenage pregnancies remained a priority (LGA, 2013). As explored in the previous chapter, NICE (2014) has extended the age target for conception prevention to young mothers up to 25 suggesting greater targeting based on age. While current policy seems to be funding approaches to reduce conception rates amongst young people, young women who do have children have seen funding for them reduced.

In 2011 the Early Intervention Grant was introduced. This grant, paid to local councils, replaced many of the specific grants paid to local councils to cover early intervention services including some services for young mothers (Powell, 2019). As this grant is not ring-fenced, local councils have discretion in deciding how to spend it (Powell, 2019). Further reductions in funding were caused by the removal of the Supporting People Grant that funded housing provision for young mothers through supported mother and baby accommodation. This grant was absorbed into the general Formula Grant paid to local authorities in 2011 and was not ring fenced for any particular service (House of Commons Library, 2012). As local authorities make their own decisions regarding which services to provide, and there is no available data on service reductions for young mothers, it is difficult to conclude exactly what services have been reduced. Reductions are also likely to vary within different authorities. However, when we couple the withdrawal of support for young mothers through the TPS (Teenage Pregnancy Independent Advisory Group 2010) with the almost 25 per cent reduction in the overall budgets of local councils (Gray and Barford, 2018) it is likely many services have ceased for this group of women. To replace TPS guidance - Public Heath England (2017) produced a document entitled '*A Framework for Supporting Teenage Mothers and Young Fathers*'. The document aims to provide general guidance for local authorities and commissioners concerning support for young

parents but does not provide guidance for how services for young parents will be funded.

In 2012, the Government launched the Troubled Families Programme (TFP). The aim of the TFP is to provide interventions for families considered 'problematic' because for example they have an adult on out of work benefits, have children who are regularly truant from school or are considered costly to the state (DCLG, 2012). While the TFP has not been designed for young mothers in particular, they have somehow found themselves absorbed as one of its target groups. The TPS was launched in response to the Summer Riots of 2011 that took place in a number of cities across England between the 6th and 10th of August (Morrell et al. 2011). The catalyst for these riots was the death of Mark Duggan, a 29-year-old man from Tottenham who was shot dead by police on August 4th (Cadwalladr, 2016). Shortly after the riots the then Prime Minister David Cameron disputed the riots were linked to austerity and instead focused on parental socialisation and family circumstances. He stated in a speech: 'I don't doubt that, many of the rioters out there last week have no father at home' (Cameron, 2011). He noted within the same speech that the absence of a male role model had resulted in young men experiencing 'anger and rage' and attempting to find a father figure by 'looking to the streets.' According to Benedictis (2012), the consensus from politicians, media and the police was that the fault for these riots lay solely with working-class lone mothers who as 'feral' parents were not able to raise their children as 'good' citizens. This approach suggests lone mothers continue to be blamed for social problems such as crime and bear the brunt of poor parenting stigmatisation; being the object of 'moral decay' (Ashe, 2013, p. 66) within society. The TFP was developed around the failing lone-parent family and their deviant sons (Allen and Taylor, 2012) while also shaming people's life styles (Nunn and Tepe-Belfrage, 2017).

There is, however, no evidence that those involved in the riots were from lone parent families. Research conducted after the riots found causes were linked to poor relationships with the police, austerity, poverty and resentment from young people about rising university tuition fees and the loss of the education maintenance

allowance (Lewis et al. 2011). Other research by Morrell et al. (2011) also found links between poverty and deprivation amongst young people involved in the riots. They also found some young people had been opportunistic looters although parental disapproval and shame acted as an inhibitor to many. Despite the evidence clearly suggesting it was wider social issues rather than family types that caused the England Riots, the TFP continues to target lone parents with this group making up over 60 per cent of participants (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2017). This is concerning when we consider lone parents make up less than 25 per cent of all families with children in the UK (ONS, 2017b). This approach to targeting families seen as problematic further enforces the negative stereotypes surrounding lone motherhood.

There is also no evidence to suggest those involved in the riots were likely to be children of a young mother or indeed, young mothers themselves. Despite this, young mothers have found themselves incorporated into the TFP. In her report outlining target variables for the programme, Casey (2012) included a section on teenage motherhood, stating: 'what was clear was that having a child that young, particularly alongside other problems such as an abusive and violent family background, meant the child was born when many of the mothers were not ready or able to cope with the responsibility' (2012, P. 55). This identification and approach to youthful parenting suggests they are labeled as problematic and viewed as not being able to 'cope' as a consequence of their age. The TFP will have received £1.368 billion in funding between 2012 and 2020 (Bate and Bellis, 2018). This is despite an evaluation suggesting the programme has had very little impact (Day et al. 2016). Their inclusion within the TFP with other lone mothers suggests once more their marital status is becoming a focal point of concern. This is set against a current austerity agenda which is characterised by growing stigma towards those in receipt of state support as well as reductions in spending on supporting young mothers.

The focus of the TFP is on targeting families seen as 'problematic' because they are seen to be behaving in certain ways such as not engaging in paid work and claiming benefits. This approach to targeting families reflects the New Right ideology which

targeted lone parents in the 1980's and 1990's. Furthermore, evidence of the New Right agenda towards young mothers can be seen in a report produced in 2013 by a group of Conservative MPs called 'The 40 Group.[24] Within the report they argued social security benefits should be withdrawn for young mothers if they refused to live at home or in supported accommodation (Grice, 2013). As Eaton (2013) notes, as most young mothers are living with their parents or in supported accommodation anyway, this proposal would have affected very few mothers and saved very little money. While these policies were not pursued by the Government, it highlights the contention of certain policy actors towards young mothers by attempting to constrain their decisions with the threat of punitive punishments.

This section has explored how policy makers have responded to young mothers with different Governments approaching young motherhood in different ways. The way in which policy constructs youthful and lone parenting is important because if and how young mothers are supported is linked to government responses. The 1980's and early 1990's targeted young mothers based on their marital status with lone motherhood being the focus of hostility. During this period these women were constructed as irresponsible transgressors who purposively rejected marriage and the father of their child; instead expecting the state to support them with bringing up their children. This perceived welfare dependency led to policy changes which sought to disadvantage lone mothers such as when accessing social housing combined with wider stigmatising of this group of women through the promotion of political rhetoric. The election of the Labour Party in 1997 brought a new policy focus to targeting young mothers based on the age. Between 1999 and the late 2000's, there was an expansion in service provision for young lone mothers through the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (TPS). The concept of youthful motherhood became central in constructing policy with a focus on both reducing conceptions in women under 18 and improving the life chances of young mothers under the age of 20 through access to specialist housing, education and SSP. Despite policy evaluations suggesting

[24] This group represented the 40 Conservative MPs who held the 40 most marginal seats in the country at the time.

positive outcomes from the SSP and some elements of the housing provision, getting young mothers to remain in or go back to education was less successful. Thus, this suggests a reconstruction of policy was necessary to enhance the educational opportunities for these young women. However, with the formation of the Coalition Government in 2010 and the subsequent austerity and welfare retrenchment there has been a contraction in services previously provided as part of the TPS. While the government launched the Framework for Supporting Teenage Mothers and Young Fathers in 2017, the focus was on providing guidance for local authorities on meeting needs rather than allocating funding for service provision. Policy focused instead shifted back to the 'problematic' lone mother with the introduction and promotion of the TFP. The rationale for this approach was the perceived failure of single women to socialise their children. The TFP purposively targeted poor lone mothers with the intention of 'modifying' their behvaiour. The issue of teenage motherhood, while briefly considered in some TFP literature (see Casey, 2012 for example) does not provide the same support for young mothers as the TPS did. This, combined with the withdrawal of funding for the TPS, suggests young mothers have been removed from the policy agenda.

The focus on the final two sections of this chapter will be on the two theoretical approaches that underpin my research, namely intersectionality and Irving Goffman's work on stigma.

2.4 Young, Lone Motherhood: An Intersectional Approach to understanding Identity Construction and Policy Implications

Roberts (1993:2) argues that much feminist thought focuses on gender as the 'primary locus of oppression' and this risks undermining other attributes that might influence their experience. In this section I will briefly explore the history and importance of intersectionality theory and then apply this approach to understanding the lives of young lone mothers and the relevance for my research. As identified in the previous chapter, the term intersectionality was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in an article written in 1989. According to Crenshaw to enable us to understand the

experience of black women we cannot just focus on 'discrete sources of discrimination' (1989: P. 140) assigned to each status. Rather we should be concerned with how each status intersects with others to create unique experiences for disadvantaged groups. Intersectionality is also about the ability of powerful actors to target and discriminate against certain groups (Nash, 2008). As this chapter has already demonstrated – it is the powerful actors such as health practitioners and policy actors who define young lone motherhood as problematic. Young mothers however deeply value their status as mothers and their caring responsibilities.

The use of intersectionality can be traced back to the work of bell hooks. According to hooks (1981) it was difficult for black women to join the women's movement in the United States because the movement did not take account of their race. hooks was keen to emphasise that ethnicity was a significant factor in understanding the experiences of women, and that could not be captured under 'gender'. During this time, campaigns for women's rights were led by white, middle class women meaning that they did not understand issues such as race and poverty (Collins, 1990). As a group, the experiences of women still differed significantly because of race and class. Thiam (1986), a feminist activist, argued that the views of black women were often disregarded by black men in the same way that they were disregarded by white women. Thus, the focus had to be on creating a movement for black women if their voices were to be heard.

The work of Bakhtin (1981; 1986), which is concerned with dialogism and polyphony in linguistics, is useful in enabling us to understand the experiences of women presenting accounts of their different statuses. According to Bakhtin, the social world consists of multiple voices which individuals can engage with, internalise and speak through. Buitelaar (2006) has drawn on the work Bakhtin to explore what she describes as different 'I-positions' (P. 259) through a single life history, intersectional lens. Through exploring identity, Buitelaar concluded that the participant had internalised different voices attached to different parts of her identity (the Woman; the Muslim) within the self. Patricia Hill Collins has written extensively on intersectionality with much of her work focusing on gender and race as an

intersectional source of oppression. One of her most significant contributions to intersectionality theory concerns the coining of the term 'outsider within' (1986, P.14). This refers to individuals occupying a position of power within a particular setting but as a consequence of disadvantaged social statuses they hold within wider society (such as being female and black); they do not benefit from the position as much as others.[25] According to Collins, this outsider within status means black women have a unique standpoint because while (as an insider) they understand the narrative of the dominant group, as oppressed women; they also understand the experiences of being marginalsied (as an outsider).

While intersectionality has been discussed extensively from a theoretical position; more recent literature has also considered it as a methodological approach. McCall (2005) argues there are three district approaches to using intersectionality as a method. The first known as 'anticategorical complexity' is concerned with social categories such as gender, race and class as distinct statuses. This approach is focussed on deconstructing normative assumptions around these social categories within social and political contexts. The second - 'Intracategorical complexity' as a methodology rejects the use of 'categories' and is instead concerned with the intersecting points of various statuses. However, this approach also argues that despite these intersections creating sources of oppression for certain social groups; these intersections are not the only factor in determining lived experiences of individuals. This approach contends that researchers should not neglect diversity between social groups – even when they have various intersections in common. The final approach – 'Intercategorical complexity' is focussed on a comparative approach to intersectonality by exploring the inequalities between different social groups based on categories such as men and women (gender) and working and middle class (social class). This approach is concerned with selecting certain outcomes such as the level of education and income and then comparing the differences between the selected social groups. While McCall acknowledges not all intersectional research will fit into these three approaches (and some projects will overlap different approaches) her

[25] In this particular article, Collins focused on black women in academia.

arguments have been widely incorporated into understanding intersectional methodology (Winker and Degele, 2011). Prins (2006) has also contributed to the development of intersectional methodology through applying a narrative approach to intersectional research and capturing how 'stories' of people not only reflect their social statuses but also their individual histories.

Brewer (1993) effectively used the notion of intersectionality to explore disadvantage among women. She argues that you cannot simply take a status such as race, gender or class and claim that each one represents an additional level of disadvantage. Instead, each of the statuses reinforces and increases the impact of the others. At present, the majority of research and literature produced on intersectionality continues to dominate around gender (usually women) and ethnicity (for example see: Bahati, 2002; Moller, 2002; Kang, 2003). Intersectional research looking at the impact of austerity has also tended to focus on gender and ethnicity. Hall et al. (2017) conducted an intersectional analysis looking at these two statuses. They found ethnic minority women have been affected by austerity based on their ethnicity and on their gender. Research by Portes et al. (2018) also conducted an intersectional analysis looking at austerity and welfare reform. They looked at a number of intersections including age and gender, age and ethnicity, disability and age and gender and income decile. For the intersection between age and gender they found that with the exception of women aged 55-64, age and gender were both important contributors to a loss of income under austerity, with women between 25 – 44 affected the most.

While many articles looking at youthful motherhood consider the issue of social class (Frampton, 2010; Nayak and Kehily, 2014) and gender (Shaw, 2010; Bailey et al. 2002), intersectionality as a theory is seldom applied. This is despite young lone mothers facing a number of disadvantages or oppressions based on their social statuses. There are a couple of important exceptions to this. Research in North America by Hess (2012) used intersectionality to explore the lives of young mothers. While she explored the social statuses of gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation, she neglected age itself as a potential source of discrimination for young mothers. Research in the UK by Mantovani and Thomas (2014) using intersectionality found

that all participants reporting feeing marginalised not just because of their status as teenage parents but because of their race and class. However, similarly to Hess' research – youth or age as a status is not explored as a possible source of oppression.

According to Salter (2017) age is often neglected when using intersectionality theory and exploring lone motherhood. In her article on media discourses, she argues that while age is central to understanding how lone mothers are presented in societal and policy discourses, it is often neglected and dismissed by researchers. The reviews presented already in this thesis has demonstrated that youth is important in constructing discourses of motherhood. The age of the mother is considered an important indicator of the outcomes of young mothers and their children.
Using intersectionality allows us to bring different types of discrimination together such as class and age in order to better understand the unique experiences of young, lone mothers. This is particularly important within the current policy context. As Chapter Three will demonstrate, young lone mothers have been targeted by policy based on all of the statuses identified for the purposes of this research. Therefore, my research will adopt an intersectional approach to understanding young lone motherhood by exploring age, lone motherhood, gender and social class as sources of stigma and oppression.

This chapter has so far sought to explore the various statuses important in the stigmatised identity assigned to young lone mothers. By deconstructing discourses around motherhood, we can better understand how young lone mothers 'deviate' from the 'good' motherhood identity as a consequence of their 'undesirable' social statuses. I have presented mainstream views advocated by professionals and challenged them based on conflicting evidence. I have also explored the use of intersectionality and explained the relevance of this approach to my own research. Different policy responses to teenage mothers have also been explored with considerations of how young motherhood is presented and the associated policy responses. In the final section of this thesis, I will explore the work of Irving Goffman and its relevance to my research with young lone mothers.

2.5 Constructing Stigmatised Identities: Irving Goffman, Stigma and the 'Presentation of the Self'

Throughout this chapter I have presented literature that demonstrates young lone motherhood is subject to a number of negative perceptions. Having these perceptions imposed on them by more powerful actors creates a highly stigmatised identity for young mothers. The work of Irving Goffman on identity construction and stigma can help explain identity construction of young lone mothers. In this final section I will explore the central elements of Goffman's approach and their relevance to my research.

Using a 'dramaturgy' approach, Goffman argued that people are social actors who put on performances for their audiences. Goffman's work on stigma is concerned with what happens when there is a gap between what a person should be (known as the virtual social identity) and what a person actually is (known as actual social identity). For young lone mothers this could be applied by looking at the difference between what mothers should be (older, married and financially secure) and who they actually are (young, unmarried and claiming welfare benefits). Additional assumptions may also be made by other actors about the identities of young lone mothers such as worklessness and poor parenting skills. Goffman argued that there were two different types of stigma: discredited stigma where this difference is known to the audience and discreditable stigma where the difference is not known to the audience. For young, lone mothers both of these stigmas could apply at different times. When meeting people for the first time without their child, it is not always apparent that the young woman is also a lone mother. According to Goffman, when the stigma is unknown, people will attempt to hide this from their audiences. Research suggests that young mothers report discrimination from potential employers based on their status as mothers (Young Women's Trust, 2017b). Therefore, mothers may distort reality in certain situations, such as a job interviews, to reduce the chances of stigma being attached and thus increase their chances of getting the job. However, on other occasions their status as young lone mothers may be very apparent and known to audiences. Interactions under these conditions contribute significantly to identify

construction. In particular the interactions between the stigmatised person and key audiences such social workers, friends, family members and other commentators are particularly important. As argued earlier, young lone mothers are subject to prejudice from numerous stakeholders and as such many interactions are likely to lead to negative experiences. This contributes to and reinforces their stigmatised identities. Thus, young lone mothers often find themselves in situations where they have to manage their performances to deflect stigma and promote themselves as 'good' mothers despite the various stigmatised social statuses they hold.

It is important to note that as young mothers, they are also managing identities such as the young person, the woman, the welfare class citizen, the lone mother and the impoverished mother. While we all, according to Goffman, have to manage numerous identities, these mothers have to manage a number of identities that are specifically associated with stigma. According to Crocker et al. (1998) when stigmas become entrenched within a culture, they are passed down between generations, eventually becoming 'facts' rather than just 'perceptions'. The 'stigmatized identities' of young lone mothers are anchored in various social statuses that focus on 'othering' young mothers (Lister, 2004a), maginalising them from society, with this eventually leading to exclusion. According to Whitehead young mothers experience 'social death' (2001, P. 437) which refers to them being rejected by society because they have failed to conform to expected social behaviours such as being older and married before becoming pregnant.

According to Goffman (1990b) stigma can be encompassed in three different forms: 'abominations of the body,' 'blemishes of individual character' and 'tribal.' All of these forms are relevant to young mothers and overlap with each other. Tribal stigma is assigned on the basis of an individual belonging to a certain social group. Young mothers belong to various social groups: youthful mothers, lone mothers, women and welfare recipients. All of these carry stigmas. Young mothers are assumed to be a homogenous group (Macvarish and Billings, 2010) meaning once the tribal stigma is applied, the blemishes of individual character will also be assigned to them. The blemishes refer to perceived negative character traits of an individual. For young

mothers these blemishes could include claiming benefits, not being in work or education, being irresponsible, and parenting inadequately. When identifying abominations of the body, Goffman proposed that certain physical disabilities can also lead to stigma. Young lone mothers may not necessarily have the physical abnormalities proposed by Goffman but their gender, youth, and even their lack of material resources (often made visible for example in the clothes they wear, the food they can afford and so forth) can all be considered physical abominations within the context of 'good' motherhood.

Goffman's theory also extends beyond stigma directly attached to individuals or groups. He further proposed the concept of 'courtesy stigma' – which occurs when individuals are stigmatised as a consequence of associating with those who have stigmatised identities. While currently no empirical study has directly explored courtesy stigma and young (or lone) motherhood; other research has found evidence of courtesy stigma in certain circumstances amongst other groups of mothers (see Hamlington et. al 2015 for example). Wider research looking at stigma more generally has found young mothers are rejected and marginalised by both their friends (Alldred and David, 2010) and other young mothers (Ellis-Sloan and Tamplin, 2019). This may reflect concerns their peers have about their own identity and the fear of stigma through association. Therefore, as young lone motherhood is a highly stigmatised; courtesy stigma could arise amongst those who associate with them.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has captured the stigmatised identities imposed on young lone mothers and equally challenged them through using critical literature and empirical research. Once young women become pregnant their bodies symbolise an opposition to the traditional life course of education, marriage and then children. The teenage body is critiqued through a variety of methods including Neoliberal discourses and concerns about the relationship between youthful motherhood and poor outcomes for mothers and their children. The social construction of young motherhood has implications for both pregnant girls and teenage mothers. They are viewed as

problematic citizens and inadequate mothers by society, professionals and policy makers. As young women, they are seen as irresponsible transgressors who carelessly become pregnant, reject education to depend on state support, and subject their children to undesirable living standards. However, these ideas are challenged by other research that suggests age is not an important factor in determining their long-term outcomes. The disadvantage experienced by young mothers is more likely to be associated with material deprivation that was present even before becoming pregnant. Furthermore, the positive experiences and health outcomes associated with youthful parenting are seldom identified in mainstream literature.

Discourses surrounding youthful parenting tend to focus on young women rather than young men. Gender is therefore also central to the identity of young lone motherhood with women bearing the responsibility of protecting themselves from pregnancy and blamed when they fail to do so. Societal discourses around 'good' motherhood provides expectations that all mothers are required to adhere to. However, for young lone mothers, who are far removed from the 'ideals' of motherhood, meeting these expectations is much harder. Additional stigma is allocated by those who advocate for the patriarchal nuclear family with lone parent households considered unsuitable for raising children. As a consequence of their perceived inability to socialise their children, lone mothers are blamed for youth deviance such as the England Riots in 2011. This is despite the fact that there is no evidence suggesting a link between household type and riot participation. Consequently, young mothers are stigmatised on the basis of their youth and their marital status.

Policy approaches have adopted a gender-based approach, focusing on teenage girls and young mothers. These approaches are also concerned with the perceived threat of teenage mothers to the traditional nuclear family and their assumed deviant bahaviours particularly concerning welfare dependency. Between 1980 and the late 1990's, young lone mothers were seen as irresponsible transgressors actively choosing a life on benefits. When New Labour was elected in 1997, the policy focus changed to targeting groups seen as (the 'so-called') socially excluded with a

particular focus on teenage mothers. While Labour's approach did create more opportunities for young mothers, much of the focus was on pregnancy prevention. More recent policy approaches have sidelined teenage mothers once more. While the Teenage Pregnancy Framework advocates intervention and support, reductions to services within the context of austerity have made its objectives much harder to achieve. The Troubled Families Programme launched in 2012 targets young mothers as a group, suggesting lone motherhood is once more viewed with hostility.

As a consequence of the social statuses young mothers hold, this group of women have highly stigmatised identities and are forced to manage these in their different social interactions. Goffman's approach to stigma is highly relevant for this group of women. Young lone mothers lead very public lives, scorned for their life choices and scrutinised based on their parenting and labour market engagement behaviours. While youth is clearly an important source of stigma and oppression for young lone mothers, age has generally been neglected by those conducting intersectionality research including intersectional research with young mothers. In the next chapter I will focus on changes in policy and the labour market since 2010 to generate an understanding of how young lone mothers have been affected by austerity and welfare related reform.

Chapter Three

Governing Young Lone Mothers within the current Policy Context

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore austerity and welfare reform related policies since 2010. As this thesis is taking an intersectional approach to understanding young lone motherhood it is important for this chapter to capture which policy changes are directed at particular social groups. These include: women, young people (and young women), families with children, those claiming means tested benefits, lone mothers and young mothers. By exploring the policy changes affecting these groups individually, I will be able to present how all of these changes are combining to have a unique impact on the lives of the women in my research.

It is important to be clear that many of the changes affecting young people such as conditionality attached to claiming job seeker allowance or universal credit[26] are not relevant to young, lone parents because they have children[27]. However, other changes such as the rollout of an ambitious apprenticeship scheme for young people, access to the living wage (which is assigned according to age) and a reduction of support in education do affect them. Changes affecting women as a group will also normally affect young lone mothers who are often confined to low paid work as a consequence of their social class. Wider changes to social security and reductions in local services will impact low-income families including young lone mothers.

This chapter will begin with a discussion on the changes to social security benefits affecting young lone mothers. I will then look at how changes to the labour market

[26] Young people aged 16 – 24 and claiming universal credit or job seekers allowance have to undertake an intensive programme including practicing job applications and developing interview techniques. Young mothers are more likely to be claiming income support and will not be targeted in the same way.

[27] Although some of these might apply to them while they are pregnant.

and employment policy have impacted on women and young people and how this has impacted on young mothers. The final section will focus on changes to local service provision for women, young people, families and young mothers.

3.2 From Chipping Away to Hammering the Safety Net: Changes to Social Security Benefits for Families with Children since 2010

As explored in Chapter One, the onset of austerity began with the formation of the Coalition Government in 2010 and their focus on reducing welfare state spending, a strategy they argued was essential to allow the UK to reduce its outstanding deficit. Much of this deficit reduction programme focused on making substantial cuts to social security, something former Prime Minister David Cameron once described as his party's 'moral mission' (Bingham and Dominiczak, 2014). Estimates by the Women's Budget Group (De Henau, 2017) suggest that by 2020 social security spending will have been reduced by £37 billion since 2010. An analysis by Tucker (2017) suggests that lone parent households were the group most affected by reductions to social security spending. While couples, on average, will lose around 6 per cent of their income (equivalent to £2,080 a year), lone parent households are expected to see a reduction of 10 per cent (equivalent to £1,940 per year). The significance of these income reductions is that currently around 43[28] per cent of lone parent families already live in poverty (DWP, 2017a). By 2021, as a consequence of reductions to social security benefits, this will increase to 63[29] per cent of households (Hood and Waters, 2017a).

As explored in Chapter One, many young lone mothers depend on social security benefits to enable them to support their children. Lone mothers under 24 are three times more likely to be claiming income support[30] (Portier-Le Cocq, 2017) meaning when changes occur - a large number of them are affected. As a consequence of their social class, they are more likely to be in receipt of child and housing related benefits

[28] After housing costs have been taken into account.
[29] After housing costs have been taken into account.
[30] As a percentage, compared to lone mothers aged 24 and over.

as well as other elements of social security support. The changes to social security from 2010 and the implications for young lone mothers will be explored in the following section.

3.2.1 Introduction of Local Financial Provisions

The Local Government Finance Act 2012 localised the provision and allocation of financial support for council tax. Council Tax Benefit (CTB) was abolished and replaced with Council Tax Support (CTS) in 2013. Central Government funding for CTS provides less funding than the old CTB system and many councils have passed this shortfall on to households who had previously been supported by CBT (Local Government Association, 2013b). According to Bushe et al. (2014) by April 2015, 244 local councils (out of 326) were requiring all households to make, at least, a minimum payment.

Under the old system of CTB those on 'passporting'[31] benefits such as income support (IS) and income-based job seekers allowance (JSA) had no liability to pay council tax. Under the new system however, 70 per cent of councils required almost all of their residents to contribute towards their council tax (Adam and Browne, 2012). Research indicates this change had affected lone parents as a group more than any other family or household tenure type. An analysis by Adam et al. (2019) found council tax arrears amongst lone parents increased by 14.2 percentage points as a consequence of the introduction of CTS. This is compared to non-lone parent households, where the increase in arrears was much less at 6.4 percentage points[32]. Perhaps more concerning however was that some councils decided to include child maintenance for income calculations when deciding how much CTS lone parents were entitled to (Gingerbread, 2013b). This inclusion devalued the financial support set aside for children and meant lone mothers would be spending the income on paying their council tax bill. Indeed, child maintenance is important for reducing poverty for lone mothers and will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

[31] Being on one of these benefits meant automatic access to other financial benefits and benefits in kind (such as free prescriptions).
[32] This analysis focused on households in paid employment.

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 set out a number of changes within the provision of welfare, which have had a number of implications for low-income families. As part of the overall reforms, significant changes were made to the Social Fund (SF). With the exception of Budgeting Loans, the remaining elements of the Discretionary Social Fund – (i.e. Community Care Grant and Crisis Loans) were devolved to a set of localised schemes referred to as Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) (Simmons, 2013). These LWA schemes are administered by local councils whose aim is to provide discretionary assistance to those on low incomes (Shelter, 2016a). Any changes within the SF will affect single women, many of whom have children, more than single men and couples. Data from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP, 2011) suggests in 2009/10 (just before community care grants were withdrawn) that almost half of the applications made for a community care grant were made by single women. These grants were intended to help people buy furniture for a new house and could also be used to help pay rent in advance. Young lone mothers particularly struggle to set up a family home on their own (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1995) and often depended on one of these grants to help them do so. Central Government funding was originally supplied for these schemes (DWP, 2011), and this covered the cost of administration in addition to the funds paid out. However, since the scheme began the amount of funding has been reduced each year. The biggest decrease being most recently from £172 million for 14/15 to £74 million to 15/16[33] (Local Government Association, 2015). As a consequence of this, Local Authorities have either had to scale back the scheme or use their own funds (Local Government Association, 2014). Aitchison (2018) surveyed 153[34] local councils and found that 28 schemes had ceased completely with the remaining schemes being reduced considerably. Ironically these reductions have taken place while the number of people identified as being in need of this assistance has increased (Gibbons and Walker, 2019). The reduction of these

[33] There has been no direct allocation of central government funding for local welfare schemes since 2015/16 meaning any schemes are funded out of monies allocated by local councils out of their wider budget (see Gibbons and Walker, 2019).
[34] This is out of a total of 343 councils in England. Not all of them can facilitate freedom of information requests meaning many did not respond to the survey.

funds will seriously limit the access young lone mothers have to discretionary payments.

3.2.2 Changes in Social Security Provision effecting Low Income Families

The Savings Accounts and Health Pregnancy Act 2010 withdrew the grant worth £190 for expectant mothers in January 2011, less than 18 months after it was introduced. The Child Trust Funds Act 2004 aimed to encourage parents to save money for their children in a specially created Trust Fund Account to access once their child reached 18. Saving Vouchers of £250 were given to every child born after August 31st 2002. An additional voucher of £250 was also given to children from low-income families. However, in January 2011 the voucher scheme was abolished and in April of the same year, the Trust Funds were replaced with Child ISAs. While the Child Trust Fund Vouchers did not benefit lone parents directly, they offered the opportunity for their children to have access to at least some money when they reached the age of 18.

In the same year, The Welfare Reform Act 2012, as mentioned in the previous section, targeted low-income families. The Sure Start Maternity Grant worth £500 for each child to families in receipt of means tested benefits was restricted to one child only and the Baby Element of Child Tax Credit (CTC), which provided an extra payment for certain families was removed. Stewart and Obolenskaya (2015) found that the loss of the Baby Element of CTC and the health in pregnancy grant alone meant families lost £730 between the sixth month of pregnancy and the child's first birthday.

Additional changes within the Welfare Reform Act affecting lone mothers included childcare costs covered by Working Tax Credit which were reduced from 80 to 70 per cent. Furthermore, since April 2012 almost all benefits have been uprated against the Consumer Price Index that is generally far less generous than the Rossi Index[35] (McKay

[35] This index was previously used to uprate means tested benefits such as Income Support and Child Tax Credit.

and Rowlingson, 2011). Thus, between April 2013 and April 2016 the majority of working age benefits such as IS claimed by lone mothers and tax credits have increased by only 1 per cent (Hood and Keiller, 2016). In 2016, the Welfare Reform and Work Act was passed leading to even more reductions in social security. Benefits that are likely to be claimed by non-working lone mothers - IS, JSA and ESA have been frozen until 2020; resulting in a loss of £6 per week by 2019/20 (British Medical Association, 2016). CB and CTC are also frozen until 2020 (Jackson and Keen, 2017). Furthermore, any subsequent children born after the first two within a family after April 2017 will not be entitled to any CTC or the child element of UC (Butler, 2018). In April 2017, the Family Element of CTC worth £545 was not included within new claims (HM Government, 2017). These changes have had greater implications for lone parents as they are more likely, as a household, to be claiming these benefits (Brewer and Shaw, 2006).

The amount families living in private rented accommodation can claim – the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) - has also been reduced. An impact assessment by Beatty et al. (2014) reported on how claimants were affected in 2011, the first year the changes were introduced. The researchers found an average reduction of £8.21 per week in LHA entitlement. This led to rent arrears for some tenants with one in five citing this reduction as the sole cause. Current LHA rates are frozen until at least 2020, despite the rising costs of rent. This has left many families vulnerable to becoming homeless (Webb, 2017). Larger families also suffered cuts in their income with the introduction of the Benefit Cap in April 2015, limiting the amount families could claim in benefits. The cap was equal to £500 per week for families with children with rent costs, CTC, and working age benefits included (CPAG, 2013).[36] In 2016 the benefit cap was reduced to the equivalent of £442 a week in London and £384 a week outside on London for couples or families with children (Norris, 2016). This is despite evidence showing that the original cap was already having devastating consequences for families including debt and homelessness (Rennison, 2014). Data collated by the Work

[36] The Benefit Cap is lifted once parent/s undertake a paid work for a certain amount of hours.

and Pensions Committee (2019) found 56 per cent of families affected by the cap are lone parent families and out of these - 96 per cent were headed by women. While young mothers may, arguably, have fewer children because of their age if they live in housing with high rental costs, they could be affected by the benefit cap. As a consequence of their social class, young lone mothers are more likely to be in receipt of social security benefits and thus, these numerous changes are likely to impact on their income levels.

3.2.3 Simplifying the System? Implications for Young Lone Mothers claiming Universal Credit

Universal Credit (UC) has replaced six means tested benefits[37] and pays claimants once each month in arrears (DWP, 2013b). It should be noted at this point that only some families are in receipt of UC and nationwide roll-out of the benefit will not be completed until at least 2023 (Gingerbread, 2019b). Currently around 980,000 families are in receipt of UC with half of these being women (DWP, 2019b). The government's own analysis suggested that the transfer to UC would affect virtually every lone parent household (DWP, 2012). When the system was first introduced there was evidence that some lone mothers would benefit. Under the proposed UC rules at the time, claimants would be able to claim additional support by working as little as one hour per week (DWP, 2013b). This was viewed as being more beneficial than the previous WTC rule that required lone mothers to work at least 16 hours a week to be entitled to additional income. Bell et al. (2007) argued that the new UC system would allow lone mothers to take up 'mini-jobs' that involve only working a few hours a week. This might have benefitted lone mothers, enabling them to work for a few hours a week, have their wages toped up through UC and have a better work-childcare balance. However, the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 set out changes to UC including a stipulation lone mothers must engage with 'work preparation requirements' including actively seeking work and taking up job offers.

[37] These benefits are: Income Support (IS), Income Based Job Seekers Allowance (IB JSA), Income Based Employment and Support Allowance (IB ESA), Housing Benefit (HB), Child Tax Credit (CTC) and Working Tax Credit (WTC).

The development of rules regarding lone parents meant this group had to work more hours under UC than they did under the old tax credit system. From 2001 new rules for lone parents claiming IS were introduced and the age of their youngest child became the key factor in deciding whether they were workers or mothers. Work Focused Interviews (WFI) for lone parents whose youngest child was 5 became mandatory in 2001 (Finch, 2003). These interviews took place at local Job Centre Plus offices where lone parent advisers would assist lone parents claiming income support to get back into work. By 2004, WFIs became compulsory for all lone parents claiming IS (Knight et al. 2006). In 2008, Lone Parent Obligations marked a turning point in the conditions attached to claiming IS. Lone mothers[38] were required to be actively looking for work once their youngest child reached a certain age, set at the age of 12 in 2008 and gradually reduced to the age 5 by 2012 with mothers only being able to claim JSA rather than IS (Johnsen, 2014). While there is no difference in the amount paid through JSA, conditions and obligations including being available and actively seeking work as well as attending training are attached (Lane et al. 2011). Under JSA rules, lone mothers are encouraged to work enough hours (16 hours per week) until they no longer have an entitlement and can claim working tax credits to boost their income. However, under UC conditionality, lone mothers are expected to start work once their youngest child turns 3 with their working hours increasing once their youngest child turns 5 and then again when they're youngest child turns 12 (DWP, 2019a).

Butler (2013) argued that early indications suggested around 700,000 lone mothers would be better off under UC, while 900,000 would be worse off. However, by 2017 as a consequence of changes to the model of UC, an analysis by the Child Poverty Action Group suggested most lone parents would be worse off under the new system (Tucker, 2017). The analysis showed that the freeze to UC rates alone (coupled with the freeze to CB) would cost lone parent families £710 a year, compared to £430 for

[38] Exceptions were made for those who had certain disabilities or long-term health problems or if they were caring for a sick or disabled child.

couples. Stock et al. (2015) argues that unless the work allowance[39] as part of UC is raised (because the 'benefits disregard' is reduced and withdrawn at a high taper rate) then work is unlikely to pay for lone mothers. Indeed, the taper rate for UC is currently 63 per cent (Mason, 2017) which is a lot higher than the Tax Credit rate of 41 per cent (Finch, 2015). Thus, families with children lose income at a much faster rate when working under the UC rules. Research by Save the Children (2012) found that because the work allowance is so low, up to 150,000 lone mothers working full time for very low pay will be up to £68 a week worse off under UC.

For lone mothers under 25 who are not working, changes to the rates of the individual element[40] (formally known as a personal allowance under IS and JSA) will be financially devastating. Under the current rules of IS, JSA and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) lone mothers aged over 18 are entitled to claim a higher personal rate. This is the same amount as childless single adults over 25, rather than the lower rate given to childless single adults under 25 (CPAG, 2018a). However, when claiming UC, lone mothers who are under 25 will only be able to claim to lower individual element. The lone parent charity Gingerbread (2013a) has reported this change will affect around 242,000[41] lone parents. This change demonstrates how important age is becoming in defining and governing lone mothers. It is important to note there will be a transitional period for families moving onto UC that, at least for a while, will ensure their actual income from benefits will not change (Shelter, 2018a). This will at least in the short-term offer some financial protection. However, this will not be relevant to people making a claim for UC for the first time and thus, young mothers currently pregnant or who have had their first child recently will not benefit from the transitional period.

[39] This is the amount families can earn before their wages are taken into consideration.
[40] This part of UC is for the individual claimants personal living costs, to pay for bills (excluding rent) and items such as food.
[41] This number is based on 175,000 young mothers under 25 currently out of work and 67,000 young mothers under 25 in employment and claiming tax credits. It is important to recognise that those in work are affected as well because the way UC in administered means their UC entitlement is reduced by their earnt income. Similar to young mothers not it work, they have a lower level of entitled to start with.

While a number of researchers have explored the impact of UC on hypothetical lone mothers (see Hirsch, 2012; Ghelani and Stidle, 2014 for example), a recent analysis by Kowalewska (2015) provides a comprehensive analysis. Using a micro-stimulation-based approach, Kowalewska included factors such as changes to council tax and income tax as well as comparing the results to how the hypothetical lone mothers would have done under the previous Labour Government's work activation policies. Her analysis showed that as soon as mothers exceeded the 16 hours, their financial returns are significantly reduced. As noted above, the rules regarding work have now changed for lone mothers who are required to look for 16 hours a week as soon as their child turns three (DWP, 2019a). Once their youngest child turns five, this increases to 25 hour per week (DWP, 2019a). This is concerning particularly as Kowalewska's analysis suggests the financial incentives of working more than 16 hours are weak. Furthermore, an analysis by Finch et al. (2014) reported that a single earner on the national living wage, after paying childcare for 2 children, would only keep £0.15 pence for every additional hour they worked. Young lone mothers are therefore highly constrained within their current economic circumstances. As poor young women, they are forced to access the severely reduced social security available to them or alternatively engage in paid employment with limited financial rewards.

There are other implications of UC for lone mothers. The first is concerning the payment cycle of once a month. This is problematic because those on low incomes are better able to budget if they are given smaller amounts of money regularly (Harris et al. 2009). Feedback from families suggest they are concerned about how they will manage the one-off monthly payment without any financial support in-between (Tarr and Finn, 2012). Furthermore, the Housing Element to help cover rent and certain service charges is now almost always paid to the claimant, unlike Housing Benefit (HB) where rent was often paid directly to the housing association or Landlord (Shelter, 2017)[42]. Research by the National Housing Federation (2018) has found higher rent arrears amongst those claiming UC compared to HB suggesting that some of those in receipt of UC are struggling to make payments each month. This might be because

[42] There are exceptions to this such as when the tenant has rent arrears.

low-income households have often never had to pay their rent directly before, do not have a bank account or are struggling to manage monthly payments (Irvine et al 2007). Claiming childcare costs through UC are far more complicated than under tax credits and require consistent monthly reporting by the claimant on the online system in addition to coming up with the first month themselves in advance (Save the Children, 2018).

The rules around work and UC represent a challenge to lone mothers. Since the late 1990's policy had focused on rewarding lone mothers who entered paid work. The New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) launched in 1998 by the Labour Government aimed to get 70 per cent of single parents into the labour market through support from the Job Centre and financial incentives (Wright, 2009). The NDLP was successful with 51 per cent of lone parents using the service gaining employment of at least 16 hours a week (Evans et al. 2003). Access to paid employment has additional gains for mothers and their children. Research suggests that employment in lone parent families leads to soft outcomes such as improved mental health for the mother and an improved self-esteem for the children (Gregg et al. 2009). Brewer et al. (2012) argue the previous Labour administrations were able to reduce overall gender income inequality by creating a tax and benefits system where money was redistributed to low-income groups such as lone mothers. Much of the success of this approach was In-Work Credit (IWC), a scheme introduced in 2004. This gave lone parents who had been in receipt of JSA or IS for at least 52 weeks, an additional tax-free payment of £40[43] each week for up to 52 weeks[44] (Simms et al. 2010). The scheme was found to incentivise work while also increasing the income for lone parents (Griffiths, 2011). However, it has since been abolished with no new claims being accepted after October 1st 2013 (HM Government, 2013).

[43] £60 in London.

[44] There were three main conditions attached to this: the claimant must be working for at least 16 hours a week, the job must last for at least 5 weeks and the claimant needed to had been out of work for at least 52 weeks prior to the job starting (Sims et al. 2010).

The support from Labour Governments certainly made access to work easier and more financially rewarding compared to claiming IS. However, most lone mothers gained low-paid and part time work (Graham and McQauid, 2014). Furthermore, exit rates of lone mothers continued to be much higher than childless women and women in couple households (Evans et al. 2004). Arguably, more needed to be done to make work financially rewarding and stable for these women. However, policy changes put forward in this chapter suggests government policy since 2010 has moved further away from this outcome.

The New Deal for Lone Parents was replaced by the Flexible New Deal in 2009 and shortly after, the Work Programme. The Work Programme was less beneficial for lone parents as it failed to consider their individual needs and the barriers they experience such as childcare (Whitworth, 2013). At present the only work programme available through the Job Centre is the Work and Health Programme[45]. Introduced nationally from the beginning of 2018, this programme is limited to certain groups who, usually, need to have been unemployed for at least 2 years (Powell, 2018a). Not having the right support available could impede lone mothers' ability to find paid work. Whitworth (2013) explored the experiences of lone mothers receiving support from the Job Centre to find employment. He found that most mothers reported that their advisers had little understanding of their needs and the hardships associated with parenting alone, particularly around childcare. This can be explained by an evaluation conducted by Bellis et al. (2011) regarding the lack of Job Centre Adviser Training for those who support service users in finding employment. The evaluation found that these advisers were required to learn 'on the job' meaning unless they had personal experience or a good knowledge of lone parenthood, they were unlikely to understand the complexities involved in managing paid and unpaid care. This lack of adequate training to understand and appreciate these mothers' situations means they are disadvantaged when attempting to enter the labour market. The decline in employment related support for lone mothers has come at the same time at the increased conditionality attached to their benefits including the use of sanctions

[45] Although, it is delivered by third parties.

(Stone, 2016). Thus, young lone mothers are likely to find any support they receive from the state highly precarious and conditional.

3.2.4 Targeting Lone Mothers through their Children: Changes to Child Support and Child Poverty Legislation

As a way to make up the shortfall in income, lone mothers are likely to be more dependent on child maintenance (CM). However, the policy concerning CM has also undergone some major changes. In 2012, the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) started replacing the Child Support Agency (CSA). According to Goodman (2015), the new child maintenance system is failing lone parents and their children. Far from ensuring that the children benefit fully from the non-resident parent's contribution, the government is forcing lone parents to pay for the maintenance they are entitled to. Under the new system, parents are being encouraged to work out private agreements. When parents cannot or will not do this, the resident parent needs to apply for and pay to use the new service. The current charge is £20[46] for all resident parents who use the service (Child Maintenance Service, 2013). This money is taken at a time when lone mothers are already having their income reduced. There are two payment systems offered by the CMS: Direct Pay and Collect and Pay. Direct Pay involves the CMS calculating how much maintenance needs to be paid and then the non-resident parent pays the resident parent directly. If the non-resident parent fails to pay, then the Collect and Pay option can be used which involves the CMS collecting any maintenance from the non-resident parent and then paying it to the resident parent. However, with the Collect and Pay option every maintenance payment passed on to the resident parent is reduced by 4 per cent. Thus, lone mothers must pay to use the service and then endure payment reductions. Research suggests the new system is not working for lone parents. Patel et al. (2016a) found only 1 in 5 lone parents who had previously used the CSA were using the CMS, and 56 per cent of former CSA users had no maintenance arrangement in place. Furthermore, despite

[46] There are a small number of exceptions; for example, those who have experienced domestic violence by the other parent do not have to pay the initial £20 charge.

the government's attempt to encourage parents to make their own arrangements, the same research by Petel et al. found that this was also not working. They found that only 19 per cent of former CSA users had set up an informal arrangement with the non-resident parent and a quarter of these involved irregular and missed payments. These findings highlight the inadequacy of the new policy around the provision of maintenance for lone mothers.

Looking at family spending patterns provides us with evidence about how money is spent within the household. Katz (2007) reports income being disproportionately spent on children (Katz, 2007). In limited family budgets, mothers make sacrifices to ensure their children do not have to go without (Lister, 2005.). Therefore, any costs incurred using the CMS are likely to affect the child.[47] An analysis by Bryson et al. (2012) found child maintenance lifts 1 in 5 lone parent families out of poverty, highlighting this important income source. However, they also reported that only a third of lone parents receive any maintenance at all, with more than half of these relying on the Child Support Agency (CSA) to collect maintenance on their behalf. Thus, the new system that promotes private arrangements is unlikely to increase the numbers of lone mothers receiving support from the other parent.

Providing generous child related benefits have been shown to reduce poverty within the household. This was demonstrated under successive Labour Governments where the amount of child benefit (CB) paid between 1997 and 2008/09 increased considerably (Ridge, 2009a). According to Kemp et al. (2004), the increase in the level of child related benefits benefited young lone mothers (who had their first child before the age of 20) the most. They found the risk of child poverty in families headed by women under 20 decreased by 30 per cent and for mothers aged 20-25 the risk decreased by 27 per cent between 1997 and 2004.

[47] Depending on the type of service the resident parent uses to receive the money, they may incur an additional charge of 4 per cent of each payment received.

The development of polices to reduce poverty amongst lone parents by incentivising work and increasing child related benefits was set against an overall aim to reduce and eventually eradicate child poverty. Many of the promises made by Labour administrations were formulated into the Child Poverty Act 2010. This made all future governments responsible for supporting policy aimed at eradicating child poverty by 2020. However, the act was renamed in 2016 as the Life Chances Act 2010 and came with a different agenda. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Health in All Policies Inquiry (2016) raised concerns about these changes, arguing that the new focus on worklessness and low education attainment as a cause of poverty failed to take account of the numbers of children in poverty. The aim to eradicate child poverty by 2020 has been set aside and instead the focus was on getting more people into work and improving the education outcomes for children in low-income households. However, as the next section will explore, adequate, sustained employment is becoming problematic for women and lone mothers in particular. Between 2010 and 2016, child poverty rates amongst lone parent families increased from 41 to 46 per cent (Barnard et al. 2017). This is despite the fact that almost two thirds of lone parents were in paid work (ONS, 2017c). According to Hood and Waters (2017b), changes to benefits are the main cause behind increases to child poverty levels. Indeed, an analysis by CPAG suggest that by 2020, a million more children will be in poverty and 900,000 will be in severe poverty as a consequence of the removal of tax credits and the cuts to UC (Tucker, 2017). As Hirsch (2015) concludes, the current political agenda risks the child poverty achievements under the previous Labour governments being undone.

3.3 Devaluing Women's Work: Why Lone Motherhood doesn't pay

With increased conditionality attached to benefits, lone mothers will have no choice but to move into work as soon as their youngest child turns three. However, in addition to the reduced incentives of UC, there have also been other changes within the labour market for women that will make it harder for lone mothers to access adequate employment. Paid work for lone parents is often insecure and low paid, making them vulnerable to poverty (Klett-Davies, 2007). An analysis by Bellfield et al.

(2015) found that 63 per cent of children living in poverty were living in a household where at least one adult worked. This analysis also found material deprivation was much higher in lone parent families.[48] The next section will look at how recent changes have impacted on paid work for women and argues that the government is failing to consider some key barriers attached to paid work such as childcare and educational development.

3.3.1 Changes effecting Women: How Austerity is undermining Female Employment

In 2013, The Women's Budget Group conducted an analysis of female labour market participation between 2009/10 to 2012/13. They found that during this period the number of women who were unemployed increased by almost 15 per cent, mainly due to job losses in the public and third sector. During the same period the private sector created 800,000 new jobs with only 44 per cent (n=352,000) going to women. While there is no direct evidence to suggest policy has influenced job creation by looking at government funding priorities, a case can be made that such funding has benefited men at the expense of women. For example, if we look at government spending particularly on physical infrastructure, we find that an estimated £300 billion has been invested in roads, rail, housing and other infrastructure between 2010 and 2015 (HM Treasury, 2013). While this has created thousands of jobs, employment areas such as building houses and resurfacing roads are generally done by men. As such the significant funding has made little impact in improving employment opportunities for women. Thus, it appears funding commitments by the government since 2010 have been directed at male employment.

In recent years there have been reductions in the number of jobs in the public and third sector, both of which are dominated by female employees. Data from the Trade Union Congress (2014) suggests that women make up 64% of the public sector workforce. Public sector jobs are particularly beneficial for mothers because they

[48] Material deprivation was also found to be high in families who lived in social housing and where someone in the family was disabled.

often include access to flexible working (UNISON, 2014). This makes it easier for mothers to manage work and childcare responsibilities. However, an analysis of job losses in the public sector suggests that between 2010-2013, the number of female public sector employees was reduced by 253,600 compared to 104,700 male public sector employees (Allen, 2013). There have been similar outcomes with third sector jobs. The government's austerity stance has led to significant funding reductions to third sector services. The National Centre for Voluntary Organisations (2014) collated data from the accounts of charities for financial years 2010-11 and 2011-12. They found that the total reduction in government funding was £1.3 billion. This reduction in funding resulted in redundancies within the sector. Data gathered by the Third Sector Research Centre found in 2011 that charities had reduced their workforce by 70,000 members of staff with an estimated 56,000 of these being women (Wilding, 2012).

As women, young mothers will be affected by these changes within the labour market and it is clear that there are fewer employment opportunities for them to access. As lone mothers, they are further disadvantaged because they are likely to be in low paid, insecure employment (Rabindrakumar, 2018). Once they engage in low paid work, they are usually confined there for the rest of their working lives (D'Arcy and Hurrell, 2014). Despite arguments from the government that the best way out of poverty is through paid work (see DWP and Malthouse, 2018 for example), they fail to invest in developing the skills of lone mothers. Research suggests that while Job Centre Plus is supposed to be helping lone mothers into work, these women are finding paid work through their existing networks such as family and friends (Haux et al. 2012). Evidence collected by Citizens Advice (2010) suggests even when mothers hold higher level qualifications, Job Centre advisers still push lone mothers to take up any available job or risk reductions to their JSA. Mothers report unrealistic expectations under the requirements to take up unsuitable work[49] and failings by the Job Centre to recognise the barriers they face (Rabindrakumar and Dewar, 2018.) The pressure for lone mothers to find work has seen them taking up insecure

[49] Such as shift work where childcare cannot be managed.

employment, often coming off benefits and becoming self-employed but often not making any money. Furthermore, around 40,000 lone parents are on zero-hour contracts (Rabindrakumar, 2018). The consequences of insecure employment and unreliable wages are severe with 10 per cent of lone mothers accessing food banks or borrowing money from payday loan companies and loan sharks (Rabindrakumar and Dewar, 2018).

3.3.2 Targeting Lone Mothers and Young People through Political Agendas

The Conservative Party 2010 Election Manifesto criticised previous Labour governments arguing that they rewarded separated couples through the tax and benefit system. Instead, the Conservative Party took a very difference stance: 'we value couples and the commitment that people make when they get married' (2010:41). This view was supported in a speech by David Cameron (2014) about commitment, marriage and children. While he notes single parents often do a good job in difficult circumstances, he argued that he could not dismiss the importance of marriage and would continue to promote it. To enable him to pursue this ideology, the government introduced the Married Couples Allowance from April 2015 where one spouse can transfer 10 per cent of their personal allowance to another without it being taxed (Seely, 2016). While this saving in tax may be very helpful for low-income couples there has been no such help for lone parents, who Cameron acknowledged were often bringing up their children in 'difficult circumstances.' Further support from marriage came from increases to funding for relationship counseling announced in 2016. Cameron pledged to double the amount of available support from £35 million to £70 million arguing 'strengthening families is at the heart of the Government agenda' (Prime Minister's Office, 2016). This additional funding must be considered within the current context of considerable reductions to social security benefits and public services. Despite Government focus on reducing state spending, there is money available to fund programmes that complement its ideological stance on the family including the Troubled Families Programme (TFP) as set out in the previous chapter. Similar to the TFP, lone mothers will not benefit from the Married Couples Tax Allowance or from relationship counseling.

The National Living Wage (NLW) introduced in April 2016 was expected to benefit 4.5 million[50] employees between April 2016 and March 2017 (D'Arcy et al. 2015). However, none of these workers will be young lone mothers because they will not be old enough to benefit. The current NLW is £8.21 per hour, however this is only applicable for workers 25 and over; with those under 25 being paid between £0.51 and £3.86[51] less than this depending on their age (HM Government, 2019c). With wage falls of 13 per cent for those aged between 22-29 compared to 5 per cent for those aged over 50 (D'Arcy and Kelly, 2015), this policy further devalues the work of young people including those who are also lone mothers. Once lone mothers do become entitled to the NLW, the taper rate of other benefits will mean many of them will see a reduction in entitlement leaving them worse off (Case, 2015). The income tax personal allowance has increased from £10,500 in 2012 to £12,500 in 2019 (HMRC, 2019). This forms part of the governments 'high wage, low welfare' economy (Jones, 2016), which is based on the idea that the more people can keep from their wage, the less they will need to claim in social security. However, many lone mothers will not benefit from this as they tend to be employed in low wage, part time work meaning they don't earn enough (Browne, 2012). For those who do benefit because of income tax changes will have their gains 'clawed back in reduced benefit payments' (Himmelweit et al. 2016: 17-18). Lone parents are also disadvantaged by the current income tax system because this is paid according to individual incomes rather than a tax on the household.

3.3.3 A Route out of Poverty? The Struggles facing Young Lone Mothers in Education

Evidence suggests that the number of qualifications lone mothers have affects the likelihood of being engaged within the paid labour market. Rabindrakumar (2018) reports nearly 85 per cent of lone parents who left education with a degree are in

[50] 1.9 million will benefit from being moved up from the current minimum wage to the living a further 2.4 million will see their wages increase from 'spillovers' where employers increase the wages of other employees so that rates of pay are scaled equally.

[51] This is including the apprenticeship rate of £3.50. Those under 18 and not doing an apprenticeship currently earn £4.05 per hour.

work compared to nearly 65 per cent who left with GCSE qualifications or equivalent. However only 39 per cent of lone mothers who have no qualifications are in work. The likelihood of being in paid employment is also linked to age, with young single mothers least likely to be engaged in the labour market (Ruggeri and Bird, 2014). Indeed, research by the Audit Office (2008) suggests pregnancy and parenthood increase the risk of young people becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). However, despite parenting responsibilities, like many other young women, mothers might want to pursue their education. As qualification level is linked to likelihood of employment for lone mothers, engaging in education may offer a route for women into the paid labour market. Furthermore, gaining a qualification could increase their chances of finding better paid work as higher qualifications are associated with increased incomes (ONS, 2011c). Mothers may want to do this through a number of different ways and their age will be an important factor in determining the courses or training they can do and the help they can access to support them. The implications of these will now be explored.[52]

According to Telfer (2012) after the age of 19, the likelihood of gaining any qualifications decreases significantly and this reduces the chance of finding stable employment. Data suggests 26 per cent of people aged between 16 and 24 are economically inactive with many of them experiencing poverty (Aldridge et al. 2011). While austerity and changes within the labour market may have impacted negatively on young people, the Government has highlighted its flagship apprenticeship policy as a way for young people to learn new skills, gain qualifications and earn money at the same time (HM Government, 2015). The progamme is regularly praised by ministers (see May, 2018 for example), however, independent sources have been critical of the programme's impact. A report by OFSTED (2015) concludes apprenticeships are a perpetuation of low-skilled, low paid work merely giving young people opportunities to make tea and wash the floors. Furthermore, the vast majority of apprenticeships last only 12 weeks, with no job offer at the end of it (Tonybee, 2012). Workers' rights

[52] Education is a devolved policy in the UK and there are slightly different practices within each country. As this research recruited a sample with South West England, I will focus on education policy in England.

groups have been critical of apprenticeships arguing that they only benefit employers looking for the opportunity to source 'cheap labour' (Butler, 2017). Indeed, apprenticeship hourly pay is much lower than the NLW (HM Government, 2018a). Thus, apprenticeships are not always delivering on the aims set out by the government. Completion rate of apprenticeships were around 69 per cent in 2015 and have been decreasing since 2010/11, meaning a third of people do not complete their courses (O'Connor, 2016). In addition to the general criticisms of apprenticeships, there is evidence to suggest women are further disadvantaged by the current system. According to the Young Women's Trust (2017a), the average hourly rate for men and women in apprenticeships is £7.26 and £6.67 respectively. Sands (2012) who collated data on apprenticeships found that 92% of hairdressing apprenticeships were done by women while 97% of engineering apprenticeships were done by men. This demonstrates gender differences remain consistent in training and employment and highlights a difference in financial compensation with hairdressing apprenticeships worth about £109 per week compared to engineering ones that are worth £189. More recent data published by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2017) reported the average rate of pay for childcare apprenticeships was £206 a week (mostly made up of women) compared to electro-technical apprenticeships at £290 a week (mostly made up of men). This gender pay gap within apprenticeships is largely due to traditional male vocations having greater financial rewards than traditional female ones. Data collected by the Department for Education (2017) groups the apprenticeships accessed by men and women into different categories. The figures show 27 per cent of women take up an apprenticeship within the Health and Social Care and very few within other sectors such as IT where there are nine times more men than women.

Government briefing data suggests age is also becoming a factor in accessing apprenticeships. In 2016/17 nearly half (48 per cent) of apprenticeships went to people over the age of 24 (Powell, 2018b). The report also highlighted that while the number of people aged under 25 taking up an apprenticeship had decreased, the number over 24 had increased when compared to 2015/16. Furthermore, when looking at age and gender together within the same year, 49 per cent of

apprenticeship went to women under 26, compared to 64 per cent of men under 26 (Department for Education, 2017). This suggests young women are not accessing apprenticeships in the same way as young men.

The pay rate for apprenticeships is particularly problematic for lone mothers who need to earn more as a single person supporting children. They are further disadvantaged because of the inflexibility of apprenticeships and the childcare costs. Indeed, apprentices usually need to work for at least 30 hours per week and part time opportunities are very limited (UCAS, 2015). This can be problematic for mothers trying to balance education, work and childcare responsibilities. While young mothers doing an apprenticeship can claim working tax credit, this only covers a certain amount of the costs. Research by Young Women's Trust (2017a) found that 3 in 5 mothers reported the pay they received from their apprenticeship did not cover the associated costs of doing it.

Those interested in developing their skills are encouraged to apply for a Professional Career Development Loan to pay for their own training and to cover associated costs such as childcare (National Careers Service, 2016). The national debt charity StepChange reported that debt was increasing amongst lone parents with 1 in 5 of their clients belong to this group (Surtees, 2006). This vulnerability to debt means they risk further financial insecurity by paying off loans they cannot afford. Taking out a loan to pursue training opportunities is a precarious challenge for lone mothers and many may not want to risk investing in their future in case they have to withdraw. The lack of access to training means their employment options are more limited and thus increases the likelihood of being confined to a cycle of low paid insecure employment with little chance for advancement.

The removal of the Education Maintenance Allowance[53] (EMA) in 2011 meant engaging in further education became more financially challenging for deprived

[53] Provided up to £30 a week for young people aged between 16 and 19 who stayed in full time education after completing their GCSE's.

young people (Wilson, 2011). EMA paid up to £30 a week in addition to bonuses for those aged 16-19 engaging in further education (Chowen, 2010). The EMA was replaced with the Discretionary Bursary Fund (DBF) in 2010. However, as a consequence of austerity, the budget of £180 million was far less than the £560 million allocated to the EMA (Pearson, 2019). Consequently, the DBF has not produced the same impacts in terms of the number of young people committed to full time further education or the grades achieved (Britton and Dearden, 2015). The DBF awards grants directly to colleges and other further education institutions for young people. Certain students will be entitled to the Vulnerable Student Bursary, as defined by central government. However, students who do not qualify for this will have to apply for the Discretionary Bursary – subject to criteria defined by their institution (HM Government, 2016). As the scheme provides varied assistance there have been concerns about the potential inequality of the way different places of study identify need (Lloyd et al. 2015). As explored in the previous chapter, young mothers often leave school without any qualifications and consequently they will be limited in terms of employment opportunities. Diminishing financial support in education is likely to further marginalise young lone mothers from schools and colleges.

From 2013, in England, young people are required to be in at least 20 hours of education each week up until the age of 17 and up to 18 from 2015[54] (Woodin et al, 2013). Those not in full time education or undertaking an apprenticeship are required to couple their education with either paid or voluntary work (Cabinet Office and Department for Education, 2015). While young mothers now have an obligation to be engaged within this system for longer[55], policy has failed to consider whether and how this will be rewarding for them. Increased conditionality around the age of their children and work responsibilities creates further challenges for young mothers wanting to engage in education. As explored in the previous section, since 2008 the

[54] This was part of the Education and Skills Act 2008.

[55] However, there is currently no legislation in place regarding when mothers should return to education and it is the responsibility of local authorities to decide if and when they should return (Department for Education, 2016).

age of the youngest child has become key in deciding when lone mothers return to work. Under the UC rules, lone mothers will have to work 25[56] hours a week either through paid work or meeting the work-related activities attached to UC[57] once their child turns five (CPAG, 2019a). While most lone mothers[58] will be subject to the work conditionality attached to UC, young lone mothers are more likely to feel a greater impact. Similar to other young people, they may want to increase their opportunities within the paid labour market by going to college. Indeed, research suggests it is when children start school that young mothers often consider returning to education (Dench et al. 2007). However, as they will have to work 25 hours shortly after their child starts school, they will have to balance their work with their education as well as negotiating childcare.

3.3.4: Paying to Learn and Earn: The burden of Childcare for Young Lone Mothers

Mothers under 20 can access the Care to Learn Grant (CLG) if they choose to do GCSEs, BTECs and most other programmes of study[59] covering costs of up to £160 per child, per week (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2018). However young mothers older than this will need to look at alternative ways to fund child care costs. An evaluation of the grant suggests it reduces the number of young mothers who are NEET and many who access the grant go on to higher learning (Riley et al. 2010). However, as identified in the previous chapter, the take up rate for the CLG amongst young mother is low and this might be in part due to the age-related restriction of the grant. Indeed, research with teenage mothers indicates it is when their children start school that they consider returning to education (Dench et al 2007). While they value the early years with their children, young mothers are keen to develop their skills.

[56] They will have to work for 16 hours per week once their child turns three under UC rules.
[57] This involves undertaking tasks for 25 hours a week such as searching for and applying for jobs.
[58] There will be a small number of exceptions such as mothers who have no work requirements because they and/or their child have certain health problems or disabilities.
[59] Mothers must be under 20 when the course starts. If they turn 20 during the programme of study, they can continue to claim CLG.

However, by this time they are in their early twenties and do not qualify for the grant. Indeed, research indicates childcare is the greatest barrier for young mothers trying to access education (Evans, 2009).

Paying for childcare is not just a concern for those within education, it is a huge bill most single mothers have to pay each month. Rutter (2015) found that the average cost of childcare for 25 hours per week for children under 5 is £115.45 for a nursery and £104.06 for a child-minder. Hirsch and Valadez (2015) found paying for childcare costs has pushed an additional 130,000 children into poverty in recent years, with almost 30% of these children from working lone parent households. Thus, far from relieving families from poverty, paying for childcare costs so that mothers can work actually creates financial hardship. Evidence from the same report found that almost half of lone parents (n=47%) needed to borrow money from family, friends or more formal institutions to pay childcare bills.

The Coalition government showed a commitment to provide free childcare places for all children aged 2[60] to 4 in England (Department for Education and HM Treasury, 2015). However, this only amounts to 15 hours each week over 38 weeks of the year (Cory, 2015). This results in a significant shortfall for lone mothers starting work before their children go to school or for those considering returning to education. The Childcare Act 2016 promised to ensure parents get access to 30 hours of free childcare a week for children aged 3 and 4. However, it remains to be seen whether this is feasible and whether it will benefit lone mothers with adequate childcare becoming increasingly difficult to access (Harding and Cottell, 2018).

Changes in the labour market, increasing childcare costs and the poor design of universal credit create uncertainty and hardship for lone mothers and their children. There is no available evidence to suggest the government has considered how all these changes taken together have impacted on lone mothers. This section has explored how changes within the paid labour market and education policies have

[60] For children aged 2 this is only in certain circumstances.

affected young, lone mothers. The final section will consider the reduction to front line services aimed at supporting women, young people and young mothers.

3.4. Abandon all Hope: Cuts to Public Services and the impact on Young Lone Mothers

While public services including charities may not put physical cash into the hands of women, many of them provide valuable advice and support. Since the onset of austerity in 2010, services and services funded by public money have been particularly vulnerable to funding cuts (Hastings et al. 2015). There is some evidence to suggest services directed at women have been targeted the most.

Domestic violence charities are usually aimed at women and children and cuts to their services since 2010 have been devastating. Towers and Walby (2012) reported that between 2010-11 and 2011-12 alone, charities focusing on violence against women received an average reduction of 31 per cent of local authority funding, with some receiving more than a 40 per cent cut. The Fawcett Society (2013) found in 2011 that almost 230 women were turned away every day from refuges run by Women's Aid because they were already full. This leaves women and their children very vulnerable, often forcing them to return home to the source of their abuse. Research by the London Voluntary Service Council, who support charities in London, found services provided to women had been particularly targeted since 2010. One of their reports produced in 2011 claimed that 81 per cent of charities reported an increase in demand for their services. Despite this increase in demand, 51 per cent of services had ceased in the previous year because of funding cuts. Furthermore 54 per cent of the remaining services said they expected to close in the subsequent year. It is not only front-line services women have lost out on. Legal aid reform has also had a greater impact on women as they make up more than 62 per cent of the recipients of civil legal aid (Rights of Women, 2010). Areas of family law previously covered by legal aid are now very restricted, and other areas such as welfare benefits and many areas of housing and debt have been removed (Garton-Grimwood, 2016).

Lone mothers have been affected by cuts to services for children. Most notably this has been through the reduction of children centers of which lone mothers are high users (Lord et al. 2011). The children centres were one of the flagship programmes under the previous Labour governments and were originally designed to support disadvantaged and teenage mothers (Lewis, 2010). Longitudinal research found the long-term effects of using children centres included improved mental health of mothers and their confidence, improved relationships at home, and improved social skills of children (Sammons et al. 2015). The researchers also looked at a group of parents who did not use the children centres and found these positive impacts were not evident. Other research by Catton et al. (2019) looked at the health outcomes of children. The researchers found areas characterised by greater coverage of children's centres saw a significant reduction in the number of hospital admissions amongst children. Furthermore, these reductions were much higher in deprived neighbourhoods, meaning poorer children benefited the most. Despite evidence that the centres reduced elements of social disadvantage and reduced certain negative health impacts, they have not been safe from government cuts. Over 600 sites were been closed between 2010 and 2015 as a consequence of Local Government funding that as argued previously has been reduced considerably between 2010 and 2017. Library budgets have also been cut in recent years meaning there are even fewer free activities parents and their children can engage in (Davies, 2013).

The reduction of funding for LAs noted above has also impacted service provision for young people, particularly around career advice and free leisure activities through youth hubs. The Education Act 2011 removed funding from Connexions – an independent service aimed at giving careers advice to young people aged 16-19 and instead placed the responsibility with schools. This decision was condemned by a Committee of MPs who argued that the delivery of adequate careers support would costs schools £25,000 a year with no funding coming from central government (Walker, 2013). The current framework for supporting teenage mothers and young fathers (Public Health England, 2017) reminds schools of their responsibility to ensure young parents receive independent careers advice. However, this may prove difficult to provide when school budgets have been reduced with funding per pupil decreasing

by 8 per cent between 2010 and 2018[61] (Sibieta, 2018). Placing this particular provision with schools prevents those not currently engaged within education from accessing support. Similar to the Care to Learn Grant, this support is age restricted and not available for young mothers who have left school. Youth hubs, usually aimed at young people between 16 and 19 have also been reduced as a consequence of council funding reductions (National Youth Agency, 2014). While there is no evidence to suggest young mothers are engaged in youth hubs, as they are free to access, it could be a place for them to meet with other young people.

Young mothers have been disadvantaged by reductions to public services aimed at supporting women, young people and families with children. If this was not enough, they have been subject to additional cuts of services directed at young mothers as a group. The Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) was rolled out from 2007 in England after piloting the programme in 2006 (Barnes et al. 2011). Those who deliver the service, called Family Nurse Practitioners (FNP), work with young parents (usually more intensely with mothers) under the age of 24 from early pregnancy until their child turns two (FNP, 2018). The service has three main aims: i) to support the mother to have healthy pregnancy outcomes, ii) to improve their child's health and development, and iii) to help young parents reach their goals and aspirations (Channon et al. 2016). As explored in the previous chapter, medical and health related literature has tended to portray young motherhood as problematic and the FNP is an example of how policy has sought to address some of the perceived negative health outcomes. According to Owen-Jones et al. (2013), the FNP was introduced to reduce the negative health outcomes amongst young mothers and their young children by providing intensive intervention through regular home visiting. The service was originally developed as the Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) in the USA almost 40 years ago by academics from the University of Colorado and is currently run in 42 US states (NFP, 2018). Similar to the UK, the service aims to improve outcomes for young mothers and their children. There has been

[61] As Sibieta argues this is a consequence of increasing pupil numbers in England and funding has not kept up with these increases.

considerable evaluation into the FNP in North American with studies looking at both long and short-term outcomes for the mother and child suggesting that the programme is very successful. Outcomes include increased likelihood of employment for mothers (Olds et al. 1998) and better academic performance in English and maths for children (Kitzman et al. 2010). However, most of these evaluations have been done by those who developed the programme. This therefore, could create a conflict of interest and may not give us an objective description of the outcomes.

Evaluations have not been conducted in the UK to the extent they have in the US, however, those that have been done have shown very mixed results. Robling et al. 2016, funded by the Department for Health, conducted a randomised control trial of the programme using 3,251 young women and measured short term outcomes including the number of mothers smoking in pregnancy, the birth weight of children, and the occurrence of a second pregnancy. The researchers found no significant difference between mothers assigned to the FNP and those who were not. They concluded that the continuation of the programme could not be justified. However, the researchers did find mothers who received FNP intervention reported better language development of their children at 12, 18 and 24 months. Furthermore, mothers stated the intervention from the FNP had been a valuable model of support.

The Department for Health has been mainly concerned with demonstrating the FNP's value for money (Ball et. 2012). However, an evaluation funded by the department, has suggested that the FNP fails to deliver value for money (Corbacho-Martin et al. 2017). This is unfortunate as other research looking at the impact from the mothers' point of view has shown more positive findings. Woodward et al. (2017), using semi-structured interviews, found young mothers reported increased self-confidence and felt the support had empowered them to make positive changes. Other research by Woodward and Ward (2016), using comparative data with other FNP studies as well as interviews with mothers, found increased immunisation uptake, increased educational qualifications and longer gaps between pregnancies.[62] Khazan (2015)

[62] There was however, no difference in smoking during pregnancy rates.

argues that the discrepancy between findings in the US and the UK could be explained by the difference in basic health care, with the UK having free health care through the National Health Service. Thus, even young mums who are not involved with the FNP will have access to medical professionals including midwives and health visitors when they need it.

Despite some positives reported for the FNP, it has also been subject to demands to save money. In Manchester the service has seen a reduction of staff and resources as the Central Manchester Foundation Trust struggles to bridge the gap between reductions in funding and providing adequate health and social care (Kendall- Raynor, 2016). In North Somerset, the service has already been decommissioned completely with provision being transferred to health visitors (Robinson, 2015). However, as the FNP is a needs-focused service it is unlikely that all health visitors will have the necessary skills to support this disadvantaged and socially excluded group. Furthermore, the number of health visitors has reduced since 2015 as a consequence of localising provision amongst councils who are struggling with reductions in funding (Royal College of Nursing, 2018). Thus, there are fewer FNPs and health visitors for young mothers to access. These reductions mean young mothers are not getting access to valuable information and support that could potentially improve the outcomes for them and their children.

The Government's current framework for young parents (Public Health England, 2017) argues that both the FNP and children's centres are essential to improve the outcomes for young parents. However, the reduction in these services means young mothers are not able to access the support they need. The framework includes a list of key recommendations for different agencies including schools, health visitors and local councils to support these parents. However, with the current funding difficulties noted in this chapter, supporting this group of women will become more challenging at the local level. While the government is keen to make recommendations, it does not provide and protect the funding necessary to support them.

Young mothers are clearly disadvantaged within the current climate. As young women, they may want to engage in education but the reduction in financial support coupled with difficulties in accessing apprenticeships based on their age and gender means accessing courses and training are more difficult. Changes in the labour market have disadvantaged women more than men and young lone mothers are particularly vulnerable to these changes. As lone mothers, they are likely to be in low paid insecure employment and additionally, as young people they are not entitled to the National Living Wage. As poor mothers, they need access to social security benefits, however these have been subject to changes and reductions in recent years, further disadvantaging this group of women. The eventual roll-out of universal credit will affect almost all lone mothers. However, as a consequence of the reduced individual element for claimants under 25, young lone mothers will be affected on their status as a lone parent and their status as a young person. Additionally, as explored in the previous chapter after ten years of expanding services through the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, these have been subject to reductions since 2010.

As explored in this chapter, retrenchment in state support suggests austerity and welfare reform are highly gendered with women being the focal point for this reform. According to Bennett (2015) as a group, women, have seen greater reductions to their income with changes to social security benefits while income tax reform has mostly benefited men. Furthermore, reductions in public spending have disproportionately impacted on women, producing what has been described as the 'Triple Whammy' (Wakefield, 2019, P.1). These include the reduction of public services which women are more likely to depend on; leading to women undertaking more unpaid care to fill the 'gap' left by this service withdrawal. This is in addition to job reductions in public services – a sector women are more likely to be employed in. This disadvantage is further extended when including other social statuses. As this chapter has demonstrated, additional statuses that women hold: being a young mother, a lone mother, and being part of the welfare class, all produce further disadvantage within current social policy. The many changes impacting on young lone mothers highlights the importance of using intersectionality as a way to understand how austerity and welfare reform is affecting them.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how young, lone mothers as a group are provided for and governed through various interventions. Some of these are directed at them as young mothers and some through other social groups they belong to. Regulations set out under the new system of UC mean lone mothers under 25 will be almost £800 per year worse off than they would have been under the former working age benefit rules. Young lone mothers engaged in employment will also be subject to lower levels of pay because they do not qualify for the national living wage. They will be required to engage in paid work for more hours when their child is very young and accessing education will be increasingly difficult because of work requirements. As the Care to Learnt Grant is only accessible for those under 20, many young mothers will not be able to access childcare – a barrier preventing them from pursuing learning and training. There are also changes effecting young lone mothers at the local level such as a reduction in provision of the FNP.

Work activation policies introduced in 1998 by the new labour government coupled with working tax credit to top up low wages not only made work possible for lone mothers, it made work pay. Improvements for lone mothers and their children under New Labour suggests the problems associated with this group such as poverty and barriers to paid work can be reduced through meaningful policy intervention. However, evidence suggests Universal Credit will not have the same financial incentives attached as the tax credits system. Literature put forward has shown that the restructuring and retrenchment within welfare benefits have resulted in a reduction in income for all families with children, but this is more evident in the case of lone parents. Furthermore, increased conditionality since 2008 has meant lone mothers need to be in paid work when their children are much younger. These mothers will be expected to work more hours under UC rules or face sanctions to their payments. Evidence presented in this chapter suggests engaging in paid work is becoming harder for women and less financially rewarding for lone mothers. Wider changes in the labour market effecting women also having consequences for lone mothers and their children.

As of 2019, the effects of austerity and welfare reform continue with little public or policy discussion on the impact on women. The evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates austerity and welfare reform is highly gendered and the impact of young lone mothers is profound. They will not only be targeted as a consequence of their gender but also their age, their social class and their lone motherhood status. Young lone mothers are bearing the consequences of reductions to public services, the restructuring of the social security system and changes within the labour market.

Chapter Four

Using Qualitative Methods to Understand the lives of Young Lone Mothers: A Methodological Approach

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will describe, discuss and evaluate the methods used to conduct this research. Starting with an in-depth discussion of epistemology and the use of feminist methodology as well as intersectionality, I will discuss how these have influenced the design of my research. The next two sections will focus on the use of stigma in my research and my position as the researcher. I will then talk more about the design of my research including the methods, their rationale, my sample, the research materials and the research process, as well as the timeframe and information about the geographical location of my research. This will be followed by a discussion of ethical considerations, the analysis of my data as well as rigour, reliability and generalisability of my research. I will conclude the chapter with some reflections on the research process and experience.

4.2 *Epistemological Considerations*

Within this section, I will introduce the epistemology underpinning my methodology with a focus on challenging traditional negative views of young lone mothers as well as exploring how they have been affected by changes in policy imposed on them. According to Moses and Knutsen (2012) epistemology refers to the production of knowledge and the way social actors understand and interpret this knowledge.

Ideas around feminism, gender and the family contributed significantly in understanding the context of my research. Feminist epistemology recognises 'women's lived experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge' (Campbell and Wasco, 2000, p. 773). The production of this knowledge is essential to improve the

lives of women by challenging traditional male views about the social world (Oakley, 1974). According to Lugones and Spelman (1995), men's accounts of female stories have often been untrue and perpetrated by ignorance or lies aimed at oppressing and controlling women's' lives. According to Letherby (2003), there are pre-conceived ideas about the traditional female life course and the role of women in society. As explored in Chapter Two, young women are expected to take a particular life course of education, employment, marriage and then children. However, if young mothers adopt an alternative life course (Baxter et al. 2013) they are subject to scrutiny and stigma regarding their choices.

Many of the expectations around gender and motherhood are put forward through theoretical and policy arguments made by male actors (see for example Scruton, 1986; Mount 1982; Murray, 1990.) There is also a considerable male bias within politics and policy making with women's interests and issues such as childcare failing to get recognition (Marchbank, 2000). Unfortunately, many of the ideas developed around gender and motherhood have been devised 'about' women rather than 'with' them and thus, their voices and the knowledge they produce are silenced. Indeed, within policy making there is considerable male bias even when looking at issues that solely or predominantly affect women. For example, pregnancy termination is arguably a very 'female issue' but male politicians and other social commentators tend to dominate the subject (Freytas-Tamura, 2018). For example, in an interview on the 6th of September 2017, the MP for North East Somerset and the Leader of the Commons (Jacob Rees-Mogg) spoke strongly against termination rights for women in all circumstances of conception (Good Morning Britain, 2017).

In Chapter Two, I considered how a number of powerful stakeholders constructed youthful lone motherhood. Health practitioners tend to view youthful mothering negatively attributing their age to negative health (Witvliet et al. 2014) and negative social outcomes (Cook and Cameron, 2017). Social care practitioners also have pre-conceived ideas of 'good' mothers with young mothers falling far short of their expectations (Rutman et al. 2002). Additionally, policy makers also view youthful mothering negatively (Duncan, 2007; Aria, 2007) by turning the choices of these

young women into a policy problem in need of intervention. However, as explored in Chapter Two, the defining and labeling of teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood as problematic is challenged by the voices of young mothers who view their status as positive (Middleton, 2011; Anwar and Stainstreet, 2015; Jean, 2015). Despite the knowledge generated through studies such as these, the negative rhetoric around young lone motherhood remains the mainstream view on this group of women. Therefore, my research sought to allow young lone mothers to tell me about their lives and challenge traditional perceptions about them. To enable me to achieve this, I used intersectionality theory to consider the various sources of stigma and oppression experienced by this group of women based on each of their social statuses. Intersectionality has been described as: 'the most significant intellectual contribution of gender studies to the world' (Hancock, 2013:260) and provides a window into the 'multi-dimensional nature of individuals' lives' (Hunting, 2014:1). I will now explore how I used this theoretical approach to inform my methodology.

4.3 An Intersectional Framework

Within this section I will provide definitions of each of the defined social statuses used within this research. I used these definitions to enable me to recruit my sample of participants. The second part of this section will set out how I adapted the theoretical approach to this research to my methodology.

4.3.1 Defining Concepts

To enable me to carry out my research, I defined each of the social statuses relevant to understanding the lives of young lone mothers. These provided clarity about how my participants were selected and how I applied relevant literature on each status and their intersection. I argue while these are based on social constructionist ideas, existing concepts and my own values - carrying out this research would have not been possible without setting these definitions.

Lone Mother

I looked at a number of elements when defining lone motherhood: the participants' view of their status, their entitlement to benefits, and their household status. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) define lone parent families as 'a father or mother with his or her child(ren) where the parent does not have a spouse, same-sex civil partner or partner in the household, and the child(ren) do not have a spouse, same-sex civil partner or child in the household' (2011:29). While this definition was helpful, as a starting point when interviewing each mother, I also discussed with mothers at the beginning of the interview if they considered themselves a lone mother or not. This was because I felt some of them could have boyfriends who were not living with them. While this according to the ONS, would make them lone mothers, participants themselves may not agree with this definition. This was done by asking if they had a partner, if this partner was the father of their child/children, what child maintenance arrangements were in place, and who had day to day care of their child/children. The responses were very mixed. For example, sometimes the women were in a relationship but did not live with the person and sometimes the partner lived with them on and off. Eventually, whether mothers reported an entitlement to income (IS) support became the main indicator of lone motherhood because this predicted their entitlement to other benefits and housing. On the few occasions lone mothers were not getting IS because of education or work – we agreed together whether they considered themselves lone mothers.

Young Person/Young Mother

As a starting point, current definitions of young people in policy usually refer to those under 25 (Smith, 2018). Mothers aged between 16-25 were defined as young mothers (and young people) for the purposes of this research. As discussed earlier, I focused on this age group because of the shift in policy towards prevention of pregnancy in women up to 25 and because there were several policy changes effecting lone mothers within this age group such as changes to benefit entitlement and the introduction of the National Living Wage which they would not benefit from. Traditionally teenage mothers under 18 (and to a lesser extent those under 20) have received a lot of attention and policy intervention. However, as explored in Chapter

One, changes in policy effecting the age women are targeted in terms of fertility coupled with policy changes such as access to the higher individual element of universal credit and access to the National Living Wage (as explored in Chapter Three), I decided to extend the age to focus on young lone mothers up to the age of 25.

Woman

When selecting my participants, I assumed them to be women based on their motherhood statuses. However, in my analysis, I considered my participants status as women and how gender influences their identity construction and the related policy implications.

Social Class

In terms of social class, I sought to recruit participants who would be considered as belonging to the 'welfare class.' In their book 'The making of a Welfare Class? Benefit receipt in Britain' Walker and Howard (2000) argue that the welfare class can be defined as a group of people who are reliant on social security benefits. By defining mothers as belonging to this group, it is not my intention to stigmatise them as benefit claimants or as dependent on welfare. Rather this definition draws on existing literature that explores the issue of stigma reported by those claiming certain benefits (Baumberg, 2016) and those using formal support services such as food banks when the safety net failed them (Garthwaite et al. 2016).

Participants were selected on the basis that they were claiming universal credit, income support, employment and support allowance or job seekers allowance. Most of the lone mothers I interviewed were receiving income support and if not (because they were at university or in employment) I looked at whether they were claiming housing benefit (HB). HB is for those 'on a low income or claiming benefits' (Shelter, 2016b). As a final point I also considered access to social housing, either being housed or currently on the waiting list. Indeed, social housing is generally aimed at those on

low incomes (Stephens, 2015). There was one participant who worked part time and lived with her parents, so she had no entitlement to IS or HB and was not currently on the list for social housing. I decided to include her however as she would have entitlement to HB if she was not living with her parents.

4.3.2 Application of Theory

Intersectionality is an intrinsic part of my research and I have used this construct within my methodology to enable me to understand each of my chosen statuses and how they intersect. The focus of my research is how a group of disadvantaged women experience hardships that are based on a number of social characteristics. Therefore, I decided intersectionality would be a valuable approach for understanding their lives. The application of intersectionality into a methodology has not yet gained traction within social research (Hillsburg, 2013) meaning the researcher is left experimenting with it as an approach (Bowleg, 2008).

As there was no detailed literature available on how to design and apply intersectionality into methods, I developed my own individual approach. Jones et al. (2010) argue that intersectionality theory has been used in three different ways by researchers. The first refers to an Inclusions/Voice Model that is characterised by exploring the experiences of a disadvantaged group by focusing on one distinct social status or a number of social statuses separately. This has also been described as the 'additive approach' (Bowleg, 2008 P.319). The second application refers to a Relational/Process Model that looks at the patterns between two different statuses. Researchers may for example look at the intersections between gender and race, gender and social class and race and social class. The third type of intersectional research is concerned with the Systematic/Anticategorical model. This approach to intersectional research assumes we cannot understand social statuses individually but rather our experiences are continually shaped by the intersection of various statuses (Brewer, 1993). Within my research I have used both Inclusions/Voice and Systematic/Anticategorical models.

When exploring the role of stigma and identity construction I have adopted an Inclusion/Voice model. This was because I was interested in exploring the various stigmas associated with each of the social statuses in my research. By doing so, I was able to generate an understanding of how the various statuses of young mothers have influenced the different stigmas imposed on them. In Chapter Five, which focuses on stigma and identity I have written separate sections for the statuses of youth, gender, lone motherhood and social class. This allowed me to explore how stigma was allocated based on each of their statuses and how this impacted on their experiences as young lone mothers. However, even when separating these statuses, it was clear there were some intersections between them. This was important to recognise and therefore I have discussed this within the same chapter. For example, while my participants argued that age was very important in generating stigma attached to youthful parenthood, I also found out that stigma was not directed at young fathers because of their age. This suggests therefore that both age and gender intersect and this is important in understanding the stigma aimed at youthful parenting.

To further explore the impact of stigma, I also incorporated aspects of Goffman's approach to identity construction into my analysis. I felt this was particularly relevant for young mothers because the combination of their social characteristics makes them more vulnerable to stigma and prejudice from others. As a consequence of this, they have to spend time 'performing' to convince people that they are adequate mothers. To allow me to use Goffman's theory methodologically, I explored the experiences of stigma amongst participants. This was done directly by asking them during the interview about their experiences of stigma, about which social actors were involved in stigmatising them and by asking them how they mitigate against this stigma. Throughout my analysis, I considered how the participants talked about stigma. In particular I considered the effect it had on them and if and how they avoided these perceptions through performance or avoidance. While the main focus of Goffman's stigma and identity was within the focus groups, these concepts also came up within the individual interviews and stigma was clearly a part of most of the lives of the mothers I interviewed. Within my first analysis chapter, I apply some of

Goffman's ideas around stigma, performance and identity to the discussions with participants. When applying Goffman's theory I have not broken down the various statuses individually but rather considered how young lone mothers experience stigma and how they present themselves in certain ways.

When considering the lives of participants within the current policy and austerity context I have also used the Systematic/Anticategorical approach. I considered how black feminists such as hooks (1984), Lorde (1984) and Collins (2000) argued that distinct social characteristics are not separate sources of oppression but rather they intersect and impact on each other to create unique experiences. It became clear when doing my policy analysis that the various changes reported by my participants created unique experiences for them as young lone mothers. Therefore, I separated the identified policy areas into three sections: housing, financial recourses and education/employment. I then considered the experiences of young lone mothers by looking at the intersection between these statues. Within Chapter Seven, when I explore formal and informal support services, I take a similar approach. By using intersectionality in this way, I was able to identify and discuss how young lone mothers as a group were being affected by various changes in policy and what the implications were for this group of women. However, where appropriate I considered how one distinct social status might have particular implications for participants. For example, when exploring changes to temporary mother and baby accommodation, as Chapter Seven will show, this had implications for lone mothers based on their age. As this change is significant in terms of the contraction of services under the TPS, I felt it important to identify this.

Collins (1993) has been critical of early empirical adaptions of intersectionality arguing that social characteristics cannot be ranked in terms of which status is more important or oppressive than another. Throughout my fieldwork I was open minded about how each of the social statuses of my participants would impact on their experiences, at no point did I consider one to be more important than the others and have not ranked the statuses in any way. Furthermore, I have ensured my analysis and findings are informed by young lone mothers by 'giving voice' (Hillsburg 2013:6)

to my participants and allowing them to challenge some of the labels applied to their status by more powerful actors.

While I felt that this was the best way in which to approach and apply intersectionality to my methodology, I also considered its limitations. According to Hancock (2007) as researchers have added one axis of oppression to another in an attempt to understand intersection oppressions, this has created a paradigm that views identity as fixed and lacking fluidity. It also fails to consider the participants as individuals who may respond to various statuses differently. I wanted to ensure it was the voices of my participants who informed this research and therefore I considered that these statuses and the intersection might result in different identity constructions for my participants. While all my participants are young, they may experience this aspect of their identity differently or indeed, not at all. As Link and Phelan (2001) argue – marginalized people are often wrongly presented as cohesive groups with similar beliefs and experiences. Thus, I remained aware that despite being all young parents, my participants may offer insight into dissimilar concepts and life events. I approached every interview acknowledging that youth and the other statuses might mean different things to different participants. Furthermore, depending on their circumstances, some of the mothers may be more vulnerable to the stigma and prejudice associated with being a young, lone mother. For example, mothers who have had experience of social services involvement regarding the care of their children may feel more judged than those who had not. The way child protection is constructed leads to expectations that come with this type of service involvement. Although I assumed age, class, lone motherhood and gender will all influence the identity of my participants, this may not be the case. As Pryce and Samuels (2010) found, being a young mother can also entail the detachment of other youth-associated identities. I also considered while one social status might make the participants feel disadvantaged, they may find another status empowering. Lone motherhood, for example, has often been seen as positive by mothers (Gingerbread, 2017).

I also accepted that, apart from gender, all these statuses were fluid and in the case of age were certainly not static. All my participants would get older and thus the definition of 'young' mother would not apply to them forever. The status of lone motherhood would also most likely change as this status usually presents itself as a short period of the life course (Bernardi et al. 2017). In terms of the experience of poverty, a characteristic of lone young mothers' social class, it was likely that most of the mothers I interviewed would be vulnerable to this for the rest of their lives. Most of the mothers I interviewed had talked about their experience of poverty when they were children, and this is common among young mothers (Allen et al. 2007). Those experiencing poverty as children are more likely to experience poverty when they are older (Griggs and Walker, 2008). Furthermore, most of the mothers I interviewed had few or no formal qualifications or skills training and this is also associated with increased risks of poverty (Barnes and Lord, 2013). This does not mean of course that they will indefinitely experience poverty. Changes such as cohabiting with a partner[63] (Dewlide and Uunk, 2008) and, depending on their circumstances, possibly through gaining paid employment[64] (Millar and Ridge, 2013) could improve their financial situation. Although it should be noted that cohabiting with a partner or engaging in paid employment does not mean they will escape poverty completely or indefinitely (Davies, 2012). In addition to this, how my participants experience poverty throughout their lives may change and it may have greater impact on their identities at certain times.

4.4 My Position as the Researcher

Rowe (2014) argues that all researchers must consider their positionality throughout the entire research process including the designing of the research materials and the analysis of the results. As a lone (and previous teenage) mother myself, my experiences influenced my research proposal when applying to pursue a Ph.D. My focus on austerity and welfare reform reflected my research interests and I combined

[63] It should be noted however that many factors affect the financial situation of step families and income fluctuations are probable (Stock et al. 2014).
[64] However lone mothers may move in and out of work over time (Stewart, 2007).

this with understanding what this would be like for young lone mothers. I also value the role of the state in intervening in problems such as poverty and homelessness and therefore my position towards recent changes in policy will take a critical approach.

As the researcher of this study, I considered how my own experiences and attitudes and indeed, the way I produce and reproduce knowledge would affect how I designed and carried out this research. Having been a teenage, single mother myself it gave me a personal connection to my research that influenced the process and outcomes. According to Ellen (1993) researchers sharing lived experiences with participants are able to relate to them and interpret their knowledge more accurately. The passion I felt for my research came from having the experience of young, lone motherhood and I believed this history would enable me to build a strong rapport with my participants. According to Oakley (1981) all women have a shared culture and as such a woman interviewing another woman reduces the power imbalance between the interviewer and interviewee. However, according to Edwards and Holland (2013) researchers often build false connections with participants by presenting themselves as having a shared status just to get the data they need. While I was not convinced this was how I approached my interviews, I was aware that I was the powerful actor in the interviews with young mothers. As the researcher I was the one posing the questions and leading the discussion. I had a clear idea about the purpose of the interviews with the young mothers and I was the one 'paying' them with vouchers for taking part. While I shared the status of being a lone mother with my participants and therefore, we were both part of a marginalized group, I accepted that this may be not be enough to conclude we shared an identity. According to Mahtani (2012) there are various social characteristics that separate the interviewer and the interviewee, and these differences could make participants feel uncomfortable about disclosing some information. Although I presented myself as a former young mother, I was always aware of the differences. Gillies (2004) for example illustrates my positionality when discussing social class, and arguing that having a certain background does not mean that you can continue to understand what it means to be working-class after being in higher education, having a successful career and making money. I was a teenage parent but now am much older and I could not claim to experience poverty in the

same way as most of my participants as my financial situation is considerably better than theirs and certainly better than when I was a teenage mother. Thus, while we shared the status of lone mother, my age, education and financial situation meant my present experiences were very different.

Despite my own personal experiences as a young lone mother and my reasons for exploring the lives of current young lone mothers, I sought to be open-minded about what I would find during my fieldwork. I spent time developing my research questions and materials to allow me to accurately present the experiences of my participants.

4.5 Research Design

This next section will look at the design of my research. As set out in section 1.6, this study took an exploratory approach and sought to address my research questions by identifying key themes. Within this section, I will consider the research methods I used, how I selected the methods for my research, the research materials I used, how I went about conducting this study and managed my data. I will conclude with a discussion on research ethics.

4.5.1 Research Methods

This research sought to understand the lived experiences of a group of young mothers and develop a detailed analysis of circumstances. Therefore, this research needed to be informed by in-depth qualitative collection methods with this particular group to fully understand their lives. This was approached through three methods: the use of individual interviews, focus groups and the recording of my own experiences when conducting the interviews through a researcher journal. I will now explore these methods in the next 2 sections.

Use of Individual Interviews

I decided that my main data collection method would be semi-structured individual interviews with participants. This would allow me to capture their lived experiences and enable me to answer my research questions. Individual interviews are often used when the researcher seeks to explore the meanings attached to particular phenomenon (Grey, 2009). This approach is very effective for obtaining information about the social reality that is of interest to the researcher (Morris, 2015). Furthermore, the semi-structured nature of them would allow me flexibility. For example, I could introduce follow up questions where participants mentioned something that I had not considered.

My research questions are concerned with the lived experiences of austerity and welfare reform from the views of young lone mothers and I wanted the research to reflect their experiences and the impact this has had on them. After deciding to collect empirical data from participants using both individual interviews and focus groups, I spent some time considering which themes I wanted to focus on in each of them. As three out of my four research questions were directly concerned with welfare reform, austerity and financial hardship – I knew my empirical data collection would involve asking participants to talk about their very personal financial, housing and relationship circumstances. I decided these issues would be more appropriate to discuss in individual interviews rather than in focus groups for two key reasons. The first was to do with the sensitive nature of topics and questions covered. Informed by previous literature, I was highly aware that most young lone mothers are likely to be experiencing poverty and have likely been impacted by austerity and welfare reform. I felt the mothers would be more comfortable talking about such personal subjects on their own rather than as part of a group. Previous research has found women are more likely to disclose information on sensitive topics within individual interviews than in focus groups (see Kruger et al. 2018 for example). Ridge (2009b) advises participants are unlikely to want to share details on sensitive topics such as poverty within a group and instead this should be done with the researcher in a 'safe and private environment' (P. 16). The second reason was concerned with practicalities and time restrains. As I was seeking detailed accounts of their lives, I was concerned a focus group of about 90 minutes would not provide enough time for all participants

to fully explore their experiences and elicit the detailed responses I was looking for. The key themes discussed in individual interviews were: social security benefits (including moving on to UC), other financial support (such as from LWAs and other services they used such as children's centres) managing money, homelessness and housing problems, family circumstances, relationship breakdown, events leading up to pregnancy, barriers to work, education and any recent reductions to local service provision they had experienced.

While it was the individual interviews and the focus groups with the mothers that are the main focus of my analysis, findings and conclusions, I realised shortly after starting my fieldwork that my research would benefit from also interviewing some of the people who supported them. After meeting with some of the practitioners who had become the gatekeepers for my research it became clear that they had considerable knowledge on how services provided for young mothers had changed in recent years. Furthermore, while I had sought to find out if mothers had experienced a reduction in services, as most of them were new mothers, they did not have any experience of this. I felt that this question could be better answered by the practitioners who worked in the sector and that their knowledge would help inform my research. Practitioner experiences can be very useful in understanding particular phenomenon that form part of their service delivery. According to Blakemore and Warwick-Booth (2013) practitioners are very important in the implementation of policy and indeed, my practitioners were providing statutory services to young mothers, most of whom were disadvantaged. The practitioners would be able to provide an 'insider' perspective on the policy related to the services they deliver and the women they work with.

Despite the introduction of practitioner interviews to compliment my research, the focus remained on the voices of the young mothers who took part.

Use of Focus Groups

While I expected data collected from the individual interviews to inform most of my research, I believed that some of the issues within my research questions could be explored in greater detail within focus groups of young mothers. When considering which key topics would be addressed in the individual interviews and focus groups, I decided the latter should be concerned with the experiences of stigma. As the research was concerned with intersectionality, focus groups were designed to incorporate the experiences of stigma around youthful parenting, lone parenting, gendered experiences of parenting and stigma related to claiming benefits. I also designed the focus groups to include questions around how participants managed stigma – for example through avoiding certain situations, challenging stereotypes and engaging in 'performance management' as put forward by Goffman (1990a; 1990b). There were two key reasons I decided to explore issues of stigma within the focus groups. The first was because focus groups act as a good platform to discuss issues which participants have in common[65] (Silverman, 2011). Within Chapter Two, I identified multiple studies which had found stigma amongst young and lone mothers as well as gendered experiences of parenthood. Therefore, stigma based on various social statuses is likely to be a shared experience mothers have. The second reason I decided to explore stigma in focus groups was because I was hoping to reach a consensus amongst participants regarding: i) if they experience stigma and from whom, ii) if this stigma is intersectional (i.e. – allocated on the basis of different social statuses) and iii) how they responded to the stigma they experience. According to Galloway (2020) focus groups allow researchers to examine 'collective sense making' (P.293). Therefore, I felt, if there were collective experiences of stigma in social environments – focus groups would be able to identify these as well as sources of stigma and shared coping strategies. I decided to conduct two semi-structured focus group interview sessions. Focus groups are a relatively new data collection method within social research, only becoming popular in the 1990's (Wilkinson, 2008) and are

[65] It could be argued that some of the key areas identified for study in the individual interviews could be shared experience's but I did not believe this would be the case. Based on literature reviews I was sure poverty would be a common theme. However, other areas such as their housing situation, whether they were in work or education and which service they used were likely to have some variation.

very useful in gathering information on the attitudes, feelings and experiences of a group of respondents who usually have some shared attributes or history (Silverman, 2010). They are often used by feminist researchers to give a voice to women who belong to marginalized groups (Kitzinger, 2004).

As my participants all had the status as a young, lone mother it enabled me to explore certain topics and develop in-depth discussions around these. I also felt that focus group interviews were ideal for exploring shared experiences of stigma and discrimination as well as shared attitudes around mothering and the intersection of gender and youth. My aim was to develop a discussion with the mothers – mostly with each other with my contribution being a minor one – to identify shared perceptions and experiences around these subjects.

Use of Fieldwork Journal

I kept a journal while doing my fieldwork to enable me to develop a reflective process within my research. This involves the researcher considering their innermost thoughts about their work and can be advantageous in evolving a self-narrative and exploring the practices as someone involved in social research (Bold, 2012).

Within my journal, I mainly wrote about practicalities of my research, i.e what had gone right and wrong after each interview, how I might adapt my topic guide (discussed in the next section) to incorporate new ideas. As I progressed, I began to consider the main themes and how to approach them within my analysis. I also talked about some of the mothers' stories and considered how certain issues such as homelessness impacted on them.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I also started writing down my feelings about the discussions I had with my participants and how this had affected me. While my main concern was always my participants' feelings towards our discussions, I had also begun to reflect on my own. According to Broussine et al. (2015) doing social research is an emotional process and it is important for researchers to recognise it as such. I

found that adding this within my journal really helped me understand why I found so many of the mothers' stories deeply upsetting. I also found being honest about how I felt enabled me to take a step back from the demands of the research when it became difficult for me.

By using a journal, I was also able to start my analysis immediately after conducting each interview rather than waiting until I had transcribed each interview and placed them into NVivo. Therefore, my journal has been included within the analysis of my research where I have reflected on many of my own observations. These have provided context on certain topics such as the visibility of the many housing related problems mothers experienced.

4.5.2 Sampling Approach

I used purposive sampling to access the mothers and the practitioners for this research. This type of sampling technique is used when the researcher selects people or organisations 'because of their relevance to understanding a social phenomenon' (Bryman, 2008:415) being explored. This method, which is a form of non-probability sampling, relies on the strategic judgment of the researcher to decide who takes part (Lavrakas, 2008) and involves selecting potential places of where to sample participants from prior to recruiting. Before conducting my fieldwork, I selected organisations which provided different types of services or support (although it should be noted that at least half of my participants were receiving support from more than one source). When sampling my participants I considered two concepts: access and adequacy. For access I considered the likelihood of being able to contact them via a third party and what the implications might be. For example, if I accessed them through domestic violence services, a key question I asked myself was whether it be appropriate for me to interview young women experiencing trauma? Eventually I decided it would not be appropriate to access young mothers this way and instead focused on young women who were currently receiving support from housing, education and children centre services. I recruited participants based on my defined

social statuses.[66] For my practitioners I considered only if they worked with young mothers and supported them through service delivery.

My sample consisted of 29 young mothers. 21 of these mothers took part in the individual interviews, 4 took part in an individual interviews and focus group discussions, and 4 took part in just the focus group discussions. In addition to the young mothers, my sample also included 4 practitioners who were involved in supporting young mothers. The practitioners were from the following professional fields: two from education, one from housing and one from a children's centre.

All of the mothers interviewed lived in the South West of England and were aged between 16-25. While I did consider looking at mothers under 16, I came to the decision that this would be problematic because they would be very hard to access. Furthermore, as they were under 16, I would need the consent of their parents for them to take part (or if they were in care – permission from those who looked after them) and I felt that this could be a complex process. I also considered that the way they accessed state support is very different from 16–25-year-olds.[67]

Personal characteristics about each of the young mothers including their age, number of children, relationship status and benefit entitlement can be found in Chapter Five (Section 5.2). Pen Portraits which give a description of the circumstances of each mother can be found in Appendices Nine.

4.5.3 Research Materials

There were a number of research materials used within this research that were relevant to each of the three data collection methods. These are discussed below.

[66] Most of my participants were lone mothers although I did interview a small number who were part of a couple because of difficulties accessing my sample. This is discussed in more detail in section 5.5.

[67] For example, young mothers cannot claim benefits for themselves or their children until they turn 16. Instead, their parents or care provider claim on their behalf. Young mothers can also not access supported housing until they are 16.

Topic Guides

The topic guides were designed to cover key areas of my research questions. As the individual interviews were my main source of data collection, I designed a detailed topic guide looking at a number of questions with a focus on changes in policy and how my participants had been affected by austerity and welfare reform. These included: housing, benefits, education, employment, budgeting, debt and service provision. I divided the topic guide into eight sections that explored each of these concepts with participants. All the questions were open-ended, and I also included prompts to guide the conversation if necessary.

Within my focus group topic guide, I developed seven sections focusing on the various statuses. While questions around money were not proposed, I did want to talk about benefits, agencies involved in delivering these benefits and the attitudes of other people towards the claiming of benefits. I also wanted to talk about motherhood, young people and lone motherhood. To enable me to understand the intersections I posed questions around how young mothers are perceived and treated differently from young fathers, how younger mothers are treated differently to older mothers and how lone mothers are treated differently to women in couples. I hoped these discussions would enable me to understand the intersections between these statuses and the impact this had on my participants. There were considerably fewer questions within this topic guide compared to the one for the individual interviews because there would be several responses from the participants. The smaller number of questions would ensure all members of the focus groups would have enough time to contribute and allow their voice to be heard. Prompts were also included within this topic guide to guide the discussion if necessary.

The practitioner topic guide was developed with the aim of understanding how services for young mothers met their needs or not, and how service provision had changed since the onset of austerity. There were four sections within this topic guide the first exploring the role of their practitioner and their experiences with young women, the second looking at overall service provision and how it had changed, the

third exploring observations from a practitioner perspective of stigma and prejudice for lone mothers, and the final section looking at the commissioning of service for young mothers.

Each of the topic guides were discussed with my lead supervisor several times to ensure they were designed to capture the information I was looking for. This discussion also helped me develop questions to ease mothers into the interview and help them feel comfortable with talking about their lives. For example, my opening question for my individual interviews was: 'Can you tell me a little bit about what it's like being a mum?' For the focus group I developed, with my lead supervisor, an opening question asking mothers to talk about what their life was like on a day-to-day basis – giving them freedom to talk about whatever they wanted to.

As well as the main questions, my topic guides also reminded me of the ethical considerations I needed to discuss with my participants as well as any practicalities. The topic guide for the individual interviews with young mothers can be found in Appendix Five, the topic guide for the focus group interview can be found in Appendix Six and the topic guide for the practitioner interview can be found in Appendix Seven.

Income Questionnaire

An income questionnaire (see Appendix Thirteen) was only used during the individual interviews. This was intended to capture how much money the participants had to support themselves and their children, where this income came from, how often they were paid, and how much was currently being deducted to pay off any debts. Knowing where the participants' income came from was useful in understanding some of our discussions during the interview, particularly how participants budgeted their money, how debts were managed and how they used their income to buy items such as food. Despite the usefulness of the income questionnaire for my discussions with the participants during the interview, I did not use them in my analysis. This was in part due to some of them being incomplete and also because the discussions with

my participants informed the themes around budgeting and debt adequately for the analysis.

4.6 Research Process

The fieldwork for this research was a long and complicated process. This group of participants was particularly difficult to reach as, I found, they seldom access support services such as children's centres. Research suggests young mothers are often reluctant to seek advice and support from services due to a fear of stigmatisation (Hanna, 2001; Robb et al. 2013). This may explain why many events I attended to recruit participants such as school holiday lunch clubs and children's centre were not attended by young mothers under the age of 26. Furthermore, as I found while conducting my research, most of the women had a number of services such as the Family Nurse Partnership, social services and support connected to their accommodation and they may have felt my presence was just another 'burden' coming to their home and asking questions.

I started collating a list of organisations which supported young mothers within the age group. Many of the listed organisations however had ceased to operate or had significantly reduced their services over the previous 5 years. Two of my gatekeepers who had agreed to help with recruitment, also gave me a list of other organisations and individual people who supported young mothers. As the process for the individual interviews with young mothers was different from the focus groups I will discuss these separately and then devote a final section on the process with the practitioners.

With the exception of one gatekeeper who I spoke with via email and over the phone, I met with my gatekeepers and we discussed my research as well as their work. We also talked about the current climate for young parents. The gatekeepers spoke to the mothers on my behalf and asked if they would be happy for me to contact them to take part in an individual interview. The mothers were also given an information sheet at the recruitment stage by the gatekeeper so that they had access to the details of

the research as well as my contact information. On contacting the mothers, I introduced myself and explained to them in more detail the purpose of the study and why I was asking them to be involved. I asked mothers if they wanted to spend some time thinking about if they wanted to take part after we had spoken. Most of the mothers felt this was unnecessary and we set up an interview date immediately. The individual interviews with the mothers were conducted either at the participant's home, the gateway organisation where they were recruited, and in one instance at the participant's place of work. I was aware that many of my participants were very young and I wanted to avoid making them feel intimidated by my status as a 'researcher' coming in and asking them questions about their lives. Most of the participants I interviewed already had a number of organisations involved within their lives such as support workers and family nurse practitioners. When conducting the interviews, I arrived dressed casually as I did not want the participants to see me as another professional.

To ensure participants felt comfortable, I did not immediately start talking about the interview when I arrived. I did not get out any of my research materials and instead, with their permission, spent some time holding or playing with their children, petting their animals and engaging in general conversation. Before starting the interview, I talked about the purpose of my research, why I had chosen to focus on this group of women and the ethical information. I also informed them that if there were any questions they did not want to answer, they did not have to. I wanted mothers to know I was interested in listening to their experiences and that these would be valued by myself and others interested in social research. After asking participants if they had any questions, we went through the consent form. Permission was sought to digitally record the interview; all participants gave permission for this.

Some of the participants also asked me questions about my life, relationships and child. I felt that this helped me build a good rapport, making them feel more comfortable about disclosing personal information. While I did not give out detailed personal information, I felt comfortable answering most of their questions.

When designing my topic guide, I considered all the areas I wanted to explore with young mothers and how these would enable me to answer my research questions discussed further in section 4.2). However, I did not follow the order of the topic guide meticulously but allowed the mothers to direct what they wanted to talk about. For example, some of the mothers started talking about their finances and thus, we went through these questions first. Unless completely off topic, I allowed the mothers to talk without intervening. Interviews lasted between 35 and 90 minutes. Most of the interviews involved a detailed discussion and while I mostly kept to the topic guide, other questions did arise, and participants brought up other subjects that were not part of the topic guide and I had not considered. Some of these were very sensitive topics including being in care, domestic violence, abuse as children, pregnancy terminations, their children being taken into care, and infant mortality. When mothers brought up these subjects, I reminded them they did not have to disclose any information they did not want to. However, I found mothers felt comfortable talking about their lives and these events, as many of them explained these events were an important part of their 'story.' For example, domestic violence was the reason some of the mothers were parenting alone.

At the end of the interviews, we completed the income questionnaire and I asked them to sign to confirm they had received the vouchers. I also gave them a list of national and local organisations that they could draw on for a variety of support including benefit calculations and help finding childcare.

The focus groups were harder to organise as I needed to find groups of young mothers that were in the same place at the same time. I was concerned that if I hired a space and invited lone participants, it would be difficult to co-ordinate to ensure everyone could be there at the same time and they may have to travel significant distances on public transport.

While identifying groups of young mothers was difficult, over the course of conducting my fieldwork, I was able to find several places that young mothers met as a group. This first was a group run for young mums aged 16-22 and turnout was

between 1 – 7 mums. On the day I attended 4 mothers were present and all were happy to take part. Fortunately, childcare was provided on site for the mothers and this made conducting the focus group discussion much easier. Similar to the individual interviews, I told participants about myself and the research I was doing. I explained the ethical issues to them and we went through the consent form. Permission was sought to digitally record the interview and all participants agreed. This focus group took place over 80 minutes and all participants contributed significantly. Participants were then asked to sign for their vouchers and were invited to take part in an individual interview, three of them agreed to this.

I attended another two groups that were designed for young mothers but unfortunately, not enough mothers were present to conduct a focus group discussion. I did however recruit a few of the mothers from both groups to take part in an individual interview. At the final group I attended, I was able to conduct another focus group that consisted of 4 young mothers. This interview was conducted in a similar way to the first one (and was digitally recorded) although it was made a little complicated in that there was no childcare available for their children on site. While the organisation had attempted to organise this and I had agreed to pay, they were unable to find appropriate care for that day. Despite the presence of the children, the focus group discussion developed well and all the topics were covered.

The practitioner interviews were much easier to organise as I had already spent time with them and they had acted as the gatekeepers for my participants. Practitioner interviews were conducted at their place of work and were digitally recorded. The process was similar to the individual interviews with the young mothers. After completing the consent form the interview was conducted. Practitioners were also given vouchers as a thank you.

After each interview recording, I transferred it onto my laptop to enable me to transcribe each one. After transcription was complete, it was uploaded in NVivo for analysis.

4.7. Timeframe of Fieldwork and Geographical Location

The fieldwork for this research took place between March 2017 and June 2018; around six to seven years after the onset of austerity and welfare retrenchment in the UK. When participants were interviewed, almost all of the policy changes discussed in Chapter Three concerned with austerity and welfare reform had been introduced including: freezes to working age benefits and child related benefits, reform of the social fund, the benefit cap, the two-child cap and reductions to local services such as children's centres. The only exception was the roll-out of Universal Credit (UC). As noted in Chapter Three, UC was introduced in 2012 but the process of moving all claimants throughout the UK onto UC is ongoing and will not be completed until at least 2023 (Gingerbread, 2019b).

Four key areas of England were identified as areas to conduct research.[68] This was in part due to ease of access in terms of travel but also because once I had made contact with one local organisation, they were able to put me in touch with others that supported young mothers and thus, this allowed me to access more participants. To enable me to have an understanding about each of the recruitment areas, I identified certain socio-demographic data. This focused on three key indicators: percentage of children experiencing family poverty[69], the local unemployment rate and the level of family homelessness. Data regarding the level of poverty and homelessness came from Public Health England (2019)[70] while the data on unemployment came from local councils[71]. The table below (Figure 4.1)[72] sets out the indicators for each geographical area, they are referred to as 'Area One,' 'Area Two' 'Area Three' and 'Area Four' to ensure participant anonymity.

[68] For the individual interviews, all of these were done over the four geographical areas. Both focus groups took place in Area One.
[69] For children up to age 16.
[70] Only the general data source is referenced rather than the data from each area to ensure anonymity of participants.
[71] These sources, which are area specific, are not referenced to ensure anonymity.
[72] All data is from 2018-19.

Geographical Location/Indicators	Level of Family Poverty	Level of Family Homelessness	Unemployment Rate
Area One	19.7 per cent	2.9 (per 1,000 households)	4.2 per cent
Area Two	9.8 per cent	0.7 (per 1,000 households)	2.9 per cent
Area Three	12.6 per cent	0.8 (per 1,000 households)	2.8 per cent
Area Four	12.6 per cent	1.3 (per 1,000 households)	2.7 per cent

(Figure 4.1: Table containing socio-demographic information for each area participants were recruited from)

In 2018-19, according to Public Heath England Data, the overall average percentage of children in poverty In England was 17 per cent and the number of families who were recorded as homeless was 1.7 per 1,000 households. In terms of unemployment: the UK rate was 3.8 per cent in 2019 (Office for National Statistics, 2020[73]). Considering the geographical areas in comparison to the national average: areas two, three and four all had lower rates on each of the key indicators; however, area one had a higher rate of all key indicators. It should be noted that while at least one participant was recruited from each area the majority of participants were recruited from area one. Twenty-one out of the Twenty-five individual interviews were done with participants living it area one; both focus groups were also done in this area. Therefore, most of the young mothers involved within this research were bringing up their children in an area with a higher-than-average UK unemployment rate and a higher child poverty and family homelessness rate that the national average.

[73] Data is recorded quarterly for the UK unemployment rate. 3.8 is the rate for October-December 2019.

4.8. Ethical Considerations

Before conducing my research, I considered all the ethical implications involved before applying for permission to undertake my fieldwork. To enable me to fully understand and implement each ethical concern, I sought advice from the British Sociological Association, the University of Bath's data protection policy and guidelines provided by the Economic and Social Research Council who funded my research. I also had support from the Computer Service at the University of Bath to ensure my laptop was encrypted and therefore my participants' information was kept safe.

I sought a favourable ethical opinion prior to starting my fieldwork. The proposal went through the University of Bath ethical review process which entailed ethical peer review via the departmental ethics offer in The Department of Social Policy Sciences. I received a favourable ethical opinion for interviewing young mothers via the departmental ethics officer in 2016 (no reference, 22/09/16). Subsequently I requested an amendment because I wished to interview practitioners - for which I received a favourbale ethical opinion from the Social Science Research Ethics Committee (SSREC) via Chair's Action in 2018 (S18-001, 14/03/18).

Use of Information Sheets

To invite participants to take part in my research I designed three information sheets. The first was for the individual interviews with the mothers (see Appendix Ten), the second was used for the focus group discussions with mothers (see Appendix Eleven), and the third was for the practitioners (see Appendix Twelve). All the information sheets included a section on who I was and why I was interested in looking at the experiences of young mothers in addition to a section on ethical considerations. They also all included contact details of my lead supervisor and myself as well as the inclusion of £20 worth of Love2Shop Vouchers as a thank you for taking part. The section that differed within the information sheets was around the structure of the interview and what topics would be discussed in the interview.

As well as seeking advice and amendments from my lead supervisor regarding the information sheets, suggestions were also given by some of the practitioners for the individual interview information sheet for the young mothers and this was amended to reflect these. The information sheets were also sometimes sent out via email and the design of the email copy varied slightly to the hard copy ensure the pages were in correct order.

Confidentiality

Within social research the researcher is responsible for ensuring that the data and information given by the participants cannot be traced back to them (Crow and Wiles 2008). All the participants' personal details, digital interview recordings, transcriptions and analysis of my interviews were stored on my personal, password protected, encrypted laptop.

There was an exception to confidentiality. Participants were informed that if they were to tell me something that made me concerned for either them or their children[74], I would have to let someone know. I told them that I would not do this without telling them first and that we could discuss together who might need or was more likely to be told.[75]

While I was confident that tracing the information back to individual participants would be impossible, I was more concerned about the practitioners as there are far fewer in this particular group supporting young mothers. Furthermore, practitioners were sharing information with me that could potentially create problems for them with their employers or funders. All of the practitioners either worked for the local council or worked for an organisation that received local authority funding. Therefore, I was highly aware that being critical of service provision (particularly at a time where

[74] This would have included acts such as domestic abuse from a current partner or self-harm.
[75] None of my participants raised anything that gave me concern for their own or their children's welfare.

services were being reduced) could potentially be a sensitive area for them to discuss. Within the interviews, practitioners explained they had been very vocal to commissioners about the reductions and changes to service provision and had voiced they did not agree with them. Despite this, I wanted to ensure my practitioners were protected when giving their views in my research. Therefore, I have taken steps in my analysis to ensure their identities are not disclosed. I have only disclosed the areas they work in e.g. – housing rather than naming any organisations. Furthermore, I have not included quotes that are highly critical of commissioners and their role in reducing services.

Informed Consent and the Right to Withdraw

To record informed consent, I designed written consent forms for all participants to sign. Prior to asking participants to sign they would have already been given an information sheet.[76] Before gaining consent, I verbally explained who I was and the purpose of the research (including my own positionality and motivations). This ensured participants were aware of what their interviews were contributing to. I also explained all the ethical considerations with them to ensure they understood how their data would be used, how their identity would be protected, that they were taking part voluntarily and that they could withdraw from the research should they choose to.

Similar to the information sheets, I designed three consent forms for all three methods of data collection: the individual interviews with the mothers, the individual interviews with the practitioners and the focus groups with the mothers. All consent forms included the same points around confidentiality, anonymity, the right to withdraw, permission to record the interview and how participants' data would be used. For the individual interviews with young mothers, an additional point was included to seek permission to include their income sources and how much they

[76] I also bought copies of the Information Sheet with me and offered to read through them with participants.

received. For the focus group consent form, the point referring to participants being able to view any data that is collected as part of the interview was changed slightly to only refer to the information they gave rather than the information everyone gave within the focus group. The consent forms can be found in Appendixes One, Two and Three.

Before starting the interview, I explained to my participants that if they wanted to stop at any time, this was absolutely fine. I wanted to ensure that they felt in control throughout the interview and did not feel any pressure to carry on if they didn't want to. I also explained to them that they did not have to answer any questions they didn't want to. Furthermore, if, after the interview, they changed their mind about being part of the research, they could still withdraw their data. A date was given on their consent form of when they would need to let me know if they wanted me to remove their interview from the research. Ensuring my participants knew they could withdraw from the research process up until their data was anonymised and used within the analysis was very important. According to Wiles et al. (2005) researchers cannot assume that the participant continues to give informed consent if they are not aware of their right to withdraw. All participants had my contact details on the information sheet and I told them to contact me if they decided they wanted to withdraw.[77]

Protection from Harm

I have previous experience of conducting research with vulnerable population; both in other projects as part of my University studies and through other projects within employment. While volunteering for Citizens Advice as an Adviser I completed a training course, and was assessed on interviewing and supporting service users where several issues arose including debt and intimate partner violence. These experiences enabled me to interview my participants about very sensitive topics including poverty, debt and domestic violence.

[77] None of the participants withdrew from the research.

I was aware before starting my research that I might interview vulnerable participants. I knew from my own literature reviews that young mothers are likely to have been in care, could possibly be victims of domestic violence and were likely to be experiencing poverty. While I did not believe any physical harm would come to participants by being part of my research, I was aware that it could have an emotional impact and I understood the need to protect them from potential psychological harm. I was aware that my topic guide included some particularly sensitive topics and that some of the discussions could upset some of the mothers. To mitigate this as much as possible, I informed mothers at the beginning of the interview that if there were any questions they did not want to answer, they did not have to (this was covered in the right to withdraw but I emphasised it separately). I also informed them both within the information sheet and when we met to conduct the interview that I was a young parent myself. Some of the practitioners I met said they felt me being a young parent myself was beneficial in understanding the young women they supported. Furthermore, two of my participants stated that they believed I would never judge a young mum as I had been one myself. Therefore, I believe that having this experience in common with my participants made them better able to discuss deeply personal issues. After the interviews were completed, I gave my participant a 'List of Useful Organisations' that they could contact if they needed additional support. When putting this list together I ensured it included advice and support groups for families, women and young people. This differed slightly depending on which area the participants lived as I wanted to ensure they had access to some services local to them. The list included a range of services including advice around debt and a free counselling service for young people. As someone who has previously worked in advice organisations within the voluntary sector, I understand how difficult it can be for people to negotiate who can offer advice and support. By creating this list for participants, I aimed to make the process easier for them should they need help in the future. A copy of this can be found in Appendix Eight but it is only a basic copy that includes national organisations. I have excluded the local organisations to ensure the anonymity of participants.

Protection from harm was of less concern for the interviews with the practitioners, as I did not feel they would be vulnerable to the issues affecting the young mothers. Furthermore, the interviews did not ask them for any detailed personal information and instead focused on their role in supporting young mothers and how this group could be better supported in the future.

Anonymity

According to Tilley and Woodthorpe (2011), ensuring participants' anonymity is a key ethical concept within social research. Assuring anonymity was very important for both the young mothers and the practitioners I interviewed.

To ensure anonymity I created pseudonyms for each of my participants. Within the research identifying details such as where my participants live, where they work, their education institution and their children's'; names were anonymised at the time of transcription. The organisations who acted as gatekeepers and introduced me to my participants have also not been identified. Anonymising these organisations not only protects the identity of the young mothers and practitioners who took part in my research but also those who did not take part but who use the relevant organisations.

The data from the participants was anonymised at the point of transcription and when writing up the transcript, I used the pseudonym that had assigned to participants.

Reward for Taking Part in Research

All participants (including practitioners) were given a £20 Love2Shop voucher as a thank you for taking part in the research. Mothers who took part in a focus group and an individual interview were given a £20 voucher for each session. Head (2006) argues there are a number of reasons social researchers might offer a financial gesture to participants. These are: to incentivize people to take part, as a form of gratitude and because they help to address unequal power balance between the

interviewer and participant. My main motivation for providing a voucher was the knowledge that these young women and practitioners would be giving up time to contribute to my research. Therefore, I felt it appropriate to compensate them for their time. On giving my participants a voucher, I asked them to sign a *'Receipt of Voucher Form' which I had prepared.* This form was an acknowledgment that they had received the Love2Shop Vouchers as a thank you for taking part in the research (a copy of this form can be found in Appendix Four).

Fieldwork Dilemmas

I encountered concerns about my own well-being while conducting fieldwork. According to Fenge et al. (2019) while protection from harm for participants is well established when considering ethical dilemmas, the psychological challenges experienced by researchers studying sensitive topics is often overlooked.
I had not expected to feel distressed as I had previously conducted fieldwork on a number of sensitive projects including: food bank usage, poverty and debt. However, I found many of the stories told by participants upsetting and difficult to reflect upon. To address this, I decided to take a well-being course that was designed for Ph.D. students. Doing this course not only allowed me to meet other students who were struggling with the emotional impact of their research but also gave me a safe space to explore the impact it was having on myself. The course also brought in practitioners to deliver sessions on meditation and reflexology. The meditation session in particular helped me develop techniques to deal with the insomnia that I had begun to develop. The course helped me to accept that I was not alone in being distressed during my fieldwork and that there were ways to help mitigate against the impact.

4.9 Analysis of Data

I adopted a triangulation approach when conducting my analysis. When conducting an analysis triangulation involves using a number of approaches to anlayse data (Salkind, 2010). My three approaches to triangulating the data were: the existing

literature regarding young lone mothers and the relevant policy as explored in chapters two and three, the data collected from my participants and the researcher journal I used when conducting my fieldwork. By using these approaches, this allowed me to enhance my understanding of young lone mothers and their experiences of stigma as well as how they have been affected by austerity and welfare reform and the hardships that are part of their daily life.

While conducting my analysis I considered how I would like to present my chapters and how I would present an academic piece of work where the experience of my participants was central to the research. It was very important to me that I ensured it was their voices informing the research and this was done in an accurate and respectable way. I considered the work of Kay Standing and her experiences of conducting research with lone mothers and the dilemmas she faced when writing up her findings. According to Standing (1998), researchers working with qualitative data are powerful actors telling the story of less powerful actors and this has serious implications. By writing up the voices of vulnerable groups of people with language aimed at an academic audience, the researcher risks reinforcing the unequal relationship between themselves and their participants. All the interviews with young mothers including the focus groups were transcribed verbatim, enabling me to get a full and accurate account of the conversations I had with them. For the practitioner interviews, I listened to them and made notes regarding some of their responses. I did not believe it necessary to transcribe them fully as these provided context to complement the interviews with the young mothers rather than accounts of the young mothers' lives.

While I decided to 'tidy up' the language (including my own language and the language used by practitioners) to include punctuation and pauses when writing up each of the transcripts, I did not alter the actual language that the mothers used. I kept in the 'umms', the 'you know what I mean,' the unfinished sentences, slight errors in words ('writ' rather than 'wrote' for example) and the swear words. I also kept terms that were popular amongst young people such as 'baby daddy' rather than correcting it to 'baby's father,' or 'child's father' etc. While I use the actual language

of my participants, I am aware that a PhD is an academic piece of work that will also be assessed on how I write and the language I use. I am aware therefore that I have introduced technical, theoretical and policy language when exploring my main themes based on the real-life experiences of my participants. I felt this was a good compromise in presenting my thesis to an academic audience, who after all, would be the main readers of my research. At the same time, using the actual language of my participants ensured their voices remained powerful and informed my research.

The transcriptions were uploaded into NVivo to enable me to conduct my analysis. I spent some time listing some of the main themes that had come up within my interviews as well as considering how these linked to my research questions. Using NVivo, I created nodes based on the main ideas I had identified. Nodes such as 'Stigma' were identified and then child nodes attached to these. My aim was to develop a thematic analysis that sought to understand the main themes amongst my participants, and then consider how these engaged with my research questions as well as other areas I had not considered when designing my research. I created two Framework Matrixes to aid my analysis. The first matrix focused on using the each of the participants (young mothers only) as case nodes and then the theme nodes were the various sources they identified as stigmatising them and how this shaped their lives as young mothers. For the second matrix I created case nodes for each of my identified social statuses – age, gender, lone motherhood and social class. The theme nodes for this matrix were the various policies that shaped their lives (including those linked to austerity and welfare reform) and each was assigned to which social status it was most associated with. For example, education was associated with youth, the use of welfare support schemes were associated with social class. Many of quotes from my participants regarding the themes were allocated to more than one case for this matrix. For example, income support and universal credit were associated with social class, lone motherhood and gender as it related to all three statuses. Even when using each matrix, I regularly went back to the transcript of each interview to give me the opportunity to reflect on the participant and their story. Memos were also added within NVivo that I had taken from my journal as well as various quotes from the practitioners.

When completing my analysis it was important for me to mitigate against any bias that could potentially occur. My triangulation of data was key in addressing any bias; drawing on a number of sources allowed me to support my interpretation of the themes. For example, I checked many of the themes identified in the interviews with young mothers against those identified in practitioner interviews. Practitioners were able to confirm themes such as insecure housing situations, reductions of services such as those around education and children's centres as well as young and lone motherhood as a basis for stigma. I also used my fieldwork journal to confirm themes where possible – this was useful for example when participants showed me disrepair issues in their home and letters concerning benefits and debt. I also referred to relevant literature, where available, to see if my research supported similar findings. Furthermore, I also used relevant policy literature including entitlement and conditionality attached to benefits as well as housing regulations (such as overcrowding) to verify some of the experiences reported by the young mothers. I was also aware that my positionality as a former young lone mother could potentially lead to bias when analysing my data. As set out in section 4.4, I was aware of this and therefore remained open-minded about the findings and did not compare them to my own experiences[78]. I did not use my own experiences as a foundation to develop ideas but rather used the raw interview transcripts to identify the themes throughout.

Intersectionality, identity construction and stigma were the major foci within my first analysis chapter. I explored the stigma identified by my participants according to each social status and applied the work of Irving Goffman on stigma and performance management. The second and third analysis chapters are more concerned with policy implications but they also consider how policy has affected this group of women based on each of their social statuses. The chapters are organised in this way to allow me to present theoretical concepts and the mother's lives in the policy context of

[78] On writing my conclusion, I did consider how the changing policy and economic context between when I was a young mother and the present may impact on young mothers experiences but this was done after the analysis and the findings chapters had been written.

austerity and welfare reform. Direct quotes from the interviews have been used to support arguments and to ensure it is my participants informing the findings.

4.10 Reliability and Rigour

Both reliability and validity are complex notions within qualitative research and are more difficult to apply than in quantitative studies (Golafshani, 2003). While some theorists consider their place within the collection of qualitative data as not always appropriate (Noble and Smith, 2015) I wanted to hold my research accountable to both.

I took the advice as outlined by Moisander and Valtonen (2006) when conducting my research to increase reliability. They argue that researchers should be transparent when presenting their methods and ensure readers are aware of their theoretical stance in relation to their interpretation of their data. In this chapter I have given a detailed account of the methods used within this study and have explained my theoretical approaches in terms of intersectionality and stigma. Therefore, when I discuss my analysis in the preceding chapters, there is clarity about how I have applied my data to these frameworks.

Accounting for the validity of my research was much harder, not least because there are such a wide range of definitions for this within qualitative research (Winter, 2000). Therefore, rather than using the term 'validity' – I have instead adopted approaches to measure the rigour of this research. In qualitative research, rigour refers to 'ways to establish trust or confidence on the findings or results of a research study' (Thomas and Magilvy, 2011:151).

When considering reliability and rigour, I implemented certain methods to ensure my data represented an accurate interpretation of my participants' experiences at a particular point in their lives. I spent considerable time designing the research materials to ensure I could capture the information needed to answer my research questions. I also dedicated time and energy to interviewing participants and

conducting the analysis of this research to ensure the findings accurately present the information given by the young mothers who took part. Silverman (2011) argues that verbatim data from the participants should be used to inform findings rather than researchers describing, in their own words, what the respondents said. As outlined in the analysis section of this chapter, all interviews with mothers were transcribed verbatim and I worked hard to ensure it is the voices of my participants informing the findings of this research. Throughout my analysis, I also continued with a critical reflection of how I was analysing my data, interpreting the voices of my participants and how I was writing up the findings within the context of what I already know and the presumptions that I have.

4.11 Generalising Findings

In qualitative research, the researcher is more interested in providing an in-depth contextualised understanding of a particular phenomenon than in making generalisations (Polit and Beck, 2010). I have adopted the same position in this study. Furthermore, as my sampling method relied on non-probability sampling, I could not generalise even if I wanted to.

As my research was conducted within the South West of England and had a small sample, I am not seeking to make any wide generalisations about the experiences of young, lone mothers. As explored in Chapters Two and Three, the services for young mothers are designed and delivered at a local level meaning their experiences are likely to be significantly affected by where they live. Instead, my research is intended to make a considered contribution to a number of sociological and policy topics. These include intersectionality, stigma, family poverty, lone parents, welfare reform and local service provision for young mothers.

4.12 Methodological Reflections

This chapter has sought to explore the theoretical foundations of my research, how I carried the research out and made sense of my data – as well as all ethical concerns. This final section will offer a reflection on my methodology.

The recruitment of this sample was particularly challenging, and it took over a year before I had recruited and interviewed enough participants. While I wanted to focus on young lone mothers, I also interviewed a number of women who were part of a couple. However, most of my sample was made up of lone mothers and therefore the status of lone motherhood remained a major theme within my research and is discussed in detail within the analysis. The use of individual interviews worked very well for this research and enabled me to collect in-depth information to answer my research questions. The additional interviews with practitioners complemented my research well and enabled me to explore how services for young mothers had changed in recent years as well as how these services are commissioned. While the process of this research was challenging and time consuming, it was certainly worth pursuing. The analysis of my data has yielded several important findings, some of which will be very useful to stakeholders supporting young mothers.

As a former young lone mother, acknowledging and exploring my positionality and connection to this research was important. Throughout the research process, I reflected on my position and how it may have influenced the design, the collection and analysis of data. When I was a teenager and young person, I shared the social position with the other young mothers in this research. However, while I still shared the lone parent status with them, my age, financial position and education meant my social position was now very different to theirs. Therefore, I acknowledged I could not claim to have current similar experiences with them. Despite this, it was important I was open to participants about my former position as a young lone mother. This ensured participants understood my motivations and therefore were able to make an informed decision to take part based on this knowledge. Furthermore, as Chapter Five will demonstrate, some of the mothers expressed they felt more comfortable talking to me because they believed I could better relate to them and would not be judgmental. My position may have therefore improved the reliability of the

information participants gave. After conducting my analysis, it became clear that the experiences of young mothers differed to my own experiences when I was their age in a number of ways. For example, I was financially more comfortable than most of them as I lived with my mother who financially supported me and my son, I was able to be engaged in full time further education and was applying to universities and even after leaving my mother's house – she continued to provide financial support[79]. However, as I did not discuss my past experiences in detail with participants, they would have not been aware of these differences. Furthermore, it appeared that it was my former position – as a young mother – that encouraged openness from the participants because as noted already, they reported believing I would not be judgmental regarding their responses as I used to be a young parent myself. Therefore, these differences should not have impacted on the reliability of the interview data. To ensure my current (or past previous) position didn't bias the finding of this research I centred my analysis on the interview transcripts rather than starting with my own experiences and attempting to build my participants lives onto these. This further increased the reliability of my research.

I used intersectionality as the methodological foundation of my research and this is a major focus of my analysis. I made assumptions that each social status would interact and affect the mothers in similar ways, but it became clear shortly after starting my fieldwork that this was not always the case. As I noted a number of times in my research journal, sharing certain social statuses does not mean that the mothers had shared experiences. Many of the reflections in my research journal considered how my research was carried out with due attention to ethics and duty of care. Throughout my fieldwork, the journal mostly detailed my reflections on the discussions with the mothers and my own observations about their lives. Reflecting on my position as the researcher, I feel confident that I was effectively capturing the real-life experiences of my participants and was a good candidate to explore the lives of young mothers. This will be demonstrated within the next three chapters that focus on my analysis.

[79] More detailed reflections on positionality are explored in section 8.4.

Chapter Five

Through the Public's Gaze:
Young Mothers Negotiation, Construction and Maintenance of Identity

5.1 Introduction

As this is the first findings chapter, I will begin by setting out they key characteristics of my sample including their age, the number of children they have, their relationship status and any benefits they were entitled to.

This chapter will then explore and present how young mothers negotiate their identity. The first part of this chapter will focus on each of my defined social statuses: age, gender, lone motherhood and social class and the stigma associated with each of them. Intersectionality research is concerned with identifying sources of oppression and discrimination for social groups and thus, exploring the stigma experienced by my participants was important to my research aims. As explored in Chapter Four, my methodological design was concerned with the additive approach to intersectionality and exploring each of the statuses separately. However, when looking at each social status, I also considered how each status reinforces and increases the impact of the others. In the second part of this chapter I apply the real-life experiences of stigma identified by my participants to Erving Goffman's work on stigma and the role of this in shaping young motherhood identities.

5.2 Participant Sample Information

Below is a table (Figure 5.1) that includes the key characteristics: age, number of children, relationship status[80] and the social security benefit entitlement of the participants who took part in this research.

[80] This is according to my definition of 'lone mother' as set out in section 4.3.1.

Participant Sample Information

Name of Participant	Age	Number of children	Relationship Status	Benefits in receipt of
Emma	18	1	Partner	Child Benefit, Universal Credit
Mia	20	1	Partner	Child Benefit
Grace	22	3 (only 1 child currently in her care)	No partner	Child Benefit, Universal Credit
Lucy	25	1	No partner	Child Benefit, Universal Credit
Ava	16	1	No partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Income Support
Evie	25	1	No partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit
Robyn	19	1	No partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support
Brooke	22	1	No partner	Child Benefit,

				Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support
Heidi	22	2	No partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support
Maria	22	1	No partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support
Ivy	22	2	No partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support
Poppy	19	1	No partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit.

				Housing Benefit, Income Support
Enid	17	1	No partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support
Lilly	24	2	Partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Working Tax Credit
Carla	20	2 (and 1 step child who lived with her and her partner)	Partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit
Kylie	25	1	No Partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit

Madison	19	1	No Partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Income Support
Hailey	25	1	No Partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit Housing Benefit, Working tax Credit
Riley	21	1	No Partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support
Zoe	25	1	No Partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support
Taylor	17	1	No Partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit,

				Income Support
Cali	18	1	No Partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Income Support
Zara	20	1	No Partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support
Trinity	16	1	No Partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Income Support
Bella	20	1	No Partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Working Tax Credit
Ella	22	1	No Partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Income Support

Nina	18	1	No Partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Income Support
Jenna	22	2	No Partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Income Support
Helen	20	1	No Partner	Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Income Support, Housing Benefit

(Figure 5.1: A table containing key characteristics of the young mothers who took part in this research).

5.3 Youth, Young Motherhood and Stigma

Discussions with participants suggested age was very important as a status in the social construction of them as mothers. Most participants argued that their age impacted on others' perceptions of them as parents. These perceptions were often laden with stereotypes and stigma and were constructed by others rather than the mothers themselves. Mothers were very aware there were particular cultural attitudes around their status and they argued these attitudes were based mainly on misconceptions.

The age of the mothers was a key topic of discussion throughout the focus group discussions and was also addressed in individual interviews. Mothers in the focus

group discussions talked in detail about how they felt their age influenced others' perceptions of them and argued that pre-conceived ideas about young motherhood made them vulnerable to prejudice. Mothers argued they were 'looked down on' by others, and their ability to parent was often questioned. In individual interviews, mothers echoed these concerns and most had personal stories of being stigmatised because of their age. My participants were clear these attitudes were linked to their age rather than any other factors. Ella, 22 who had one child aged 2 years and was 7 months pregnant compared young mums to older ones and argued:

> *'If you had a teenage mum sat next to like an older 30-something year old mum, that [30-something year old] mum would automatically be like classed as like the better mum.'*

While Helen, 20, who had a 9-month-old daughter argued that all mothers went through an *'identity crisis'* when having their first child, but argued young mothers were likely to struggle more as a consequence of societal prejudice:

> *'When you're younger, it's even harder. I think because there's so much kind of separate questioning that, I mean it sounds really deep but [the perception] society has about young parents, you're even more than just that child's mum. So instead of thinking about what you want to do it's how are you gonna manage when you're so young.'*

Ella highlights the commonly held belief that young mothers are 'inferior' to older mothers, even when nothing else is known about them as parents. In other words, they are inferior simply because they are younger. Helen too argued that young mothers were also stigmatised about how they cope with their caring responsibilities. My participants also talked about some of the comments they had received from other people within their daily lives. Mia, aged 20 who had a daughter aged 9 months, had saved hard to buy a particular pram for her baby but found her choice questioned by a stranger:

'There was an old lady in Waitrose one day and she was like 'oh that's a lot of money for a young mum isn't it?' And I was just a bit like actually I saved up for this.'

On moving into her first property Carla, 20 who had two children aged 2 years and 6 weeks, believed she was stigmatised because she was a young mum and was labelled with a particularly derogatory word:

'I had 'slut' painted on my door.'

This type of terminology to describe young mothers is common. As explored in Chapter Two, Shaw has proposed the 'stupid slut' (2010, p.59) discourse to explore perceptions of young women. They are 'sluts' for engaging in sexual behaviour, and 'stupid' because they became pregnant as a consequence.

Evie, 25, who had a 6-year-old son reflected on becoming pregnant at 19. She argued that people made a lot of assumptions about her becoming a young mum. Evie displayed a strong sense of agency when she talked about her life. She argued she was working hard through higher education to show everyone their perceptions about her were wrong:

'There was a lot of judgments that I'd ruined my life when I fell pregnant. I'm not gonna get anywhere now cause I've had a child young. Lots of stereotypes. And I've just….well I've not quite proved them wrong cause I've not finished uni yet but I've shown them I've done better than what I was doing when I didn't have a child.'

The discussions around age suggests my participants are aware of the negative perceptions of young mothers and have experienced direct criticisms and abuse. It wasn't just strangers who made comments to my participants. Mothers reported stigma from two social groups in particular: their peers and older mothers. With her family living far away, Emma who was 17 when she found out she was pregnant really

valued her friendships. However, she found it hard to be accepted by some of her friends when she told them about her pregnancy:

> *'I had a few close friends, but a lot of people were a little bit like 'oh she's pregnant' like the natural stereotypes that people have. I lost friends through it.'*

Similar to Emma, most of the mothers I interviewed reported not having many friends – with pregnancy and motherhood sometimes leading to the loss of friendships. It wasn't clear why young mothers had not been able to retain friendships with peers they were close to prior to becoming pregnant. As set out in Chapter Two, Goffman (1990a) put forward the concept of courtesy stigma and this may explain the actions of these friends. This reflects Shaw's (2010, P.59) 'Stupid Slut' discourse and young people's (especially women's) fear of being associated with someone who is 'known' to engage in sexual activity and failing to take action to prevent pregnancy. As young women's sexual activity and pregnancy prevention strategies are subject to wider public scrutiny (Aapola et al. 2005), young people may remove themselves from established friendships to prevent the scrutiny of their own lives.

As a consequence of the lack of friendships, some of my participants reported feeling isolated and the lack of disposable income meant they seldom took their children out. Caring responsibilities made it difficult for them to maintain their relationships and friendships with peers once they had their children. As well as struggling to identify with other young people, many participants told me they struggled to identify with older mothers, often feeling they had little in common with them. Some mothers even reported being ignored and judged by older mothers. Mia had decided not to attend prenatal groups as she was anxious about age related judgments. Wanting her young child to experience social interaction, she decided to attend a children's centre but described the other mothers there as *'clicky'* and judgmental. As she explained: *'They think I am a young mum and they can't be bothered.*' She found the other mothers (who as she noted were older than her) unfriendly and felt this was related to her age:

'I think quite a few of them are [judgmental and unfriendly] because I am young but so like when [child] is quiet and sat in her pram like gurgling away and being happy and we get looks and I know they are definitely because I am young.'

Poppy 19, who had a 2-year-old son also wanted to attend a local children's centre. She was living in temporary accommodation that was far away from her family and friends and was looking to meet other mums. However similar to Mia, when she tried attending the children's centre she was put off almost immediately. Describing the reception she received from older mothers she stated:

'They look at you like with disgrace. They think, I don't know. They might think you are younger than what you are. It ain't a problem but you shouldn't really judge someone when they've got a child. But I've just got used to it now cause it don't really bother me anymore, cause they don't know the situation, they don't know nothing.'

Emma, 18, who had one child aged 5 months, also reported similar treatment at an antenatal group. Hoping to lose some of the weight she had gained during her pregnancy, she joined the group and wanted to meet other mums and share advice. However, she felt the other mothers reacted negatively because of her age:

'There is one woman there who, we all sit and talk, and she is a lot older than me, and if I give her advice, even a midwife said that I am right she won't listen to me because I am young and she thinks that young mums don't know anything.'

Lucy, at 25 and with a 5-year-old son had also attended children centres. She reported mixed experiences from other mothers and said she sometimes experienced negative comments based on her age although she was always 'very aware of people looking.' Lucy argued that others felt it more acceptable to comment on the age of mothers rather than on other characteristics:

'I don't get annoyed with people, but I do feel it is, they feel very comfortable to comment on my age, but then you wouldn't comment oh you are old for being a mum or you look overweight or you look too skinny. Like you don't say people look too skinny and there's a balance of that and there has been like 'oh you look too young to be a mum' and you get that a lot.'

These experiences reported by mothers suggest they are strongly aware of how others perceive them and believe many of these judgments are related to their age. Even amongst other mothers, my participants generally felt unwelcome when they attended parent and children services. Some mothers tended to avoid these types of activities to avoid judgments. Indeed, when asked about whether she had accessed children centres, Ava, aged 16 and with 7-week-old child, was clear she would avoid them unless they were aimed at young parents. She had recently given birth and because of her age she argued older mothers would never be able to understand her situation:

'I think older mums don't have that much empathy for young mums because they haven't done it. So they're always thinking - why did you? But it's simple – some people get pregnant, some people don't.'

These experiences reported by mothers suggest they are judged on the basis on their age. Being in public settings allows other social actors to view these young women and make judgments drawing on the negative stereotypes about youth and motherhood. Other empirical research looking at young mothers' experiences of stigma within the public arena has produced similar findings. Whitley and Kirmayer (2008) found young mothers reported experiences of stigma from strangers and attributed this solely to their age. Other research by Kirkman et al. (2001) found that mothers reported negative attitudes from others around their ability to parent. This resulted in them feeling socially excluded from groups who stigmatised them such as older mothers. In addition to young mothers talking about their experiences of stigma, my interviews with practitioners also captured the negative attitudes directed towards young mothers.

Anne had worked with young parents[81] (mostly mothers) for years, primarily providing them with advice and support to stay in or return to education. In addition to this task, Anne also took on other roles such as accompanying mothers to medical appointments, helping them with benefit application forms, preventing social exclusion and running parenting courses. She argued people had stereotypical attitudes towards young mothers and often targeted them based on their age. She talked about her observations of working with young mothers and their reported experiences:

> *'People are often judgmental about the fact that they have had a baby at that age. Even for example travelling on the bus, some of our younger mums in the past have had bus drivers refusing to give them a child fare because they've got a baby. So according to them you can't have a baby and be a child yourself – you have to pay adult fare. And this is all happening in front of a busy bus. It's kind of like a daily occurrence, people commenting. It's incredible how people do think it's alright to comment to some people that they've never met before, or tut, or stare.'*

As well as general notions of societal stigma based on young motherhood, my participants also talked about their experiences of prejudice from certain professionals. Mothers reported negative comments and attitudes from health and social care practitioners. Consequently, mothers struggled with the intervention of these professionals and felt stigmatised because of their age. Mia talked about being upset because she was advised to take couples counselling with her partner by their health visitor, something she felt was linked to them being teenagers:

> *'She was like have you two thought about counselling since you haven't been together very long.'*

[81] Anne officially worked with young parents up until the age of 19 but often supported young mothers beyond this age.

Mia subsequently ceased communication with her health visitor. Ivy, 22 who was pregnant and had 2 children aged 4 and 2, also reported some difficulties with her health visitor and other health professionals because of her age:

> *'They look at everything you're doing and everything's wrong.'*

Cali, 18, who had a 6-week-old daughter reported being judged by the nurses caring for her shortly after she had given birth. She felt that she had been treated differently and stigmatised because of her age:

> *'When I got up on the ward they treated me so much different to everybody else. I was breastfeeding and I didn't want to do it anymore cause it was hurting me, it was bleeding and they told me that I need to get my act together and feed my baby properly or I'm not going home.'*

Similar to other mothers in this research, Evie had decided very soon after the birth of her son not to attend children's centres and other groups for parents and their children. She reported often feeling judged by others based on her age and deliberately avoided situations that might lead to this. However, on occasions she was placed in situations where she would have to engage with others whom she believed held negative perceptions based on her age. She told me of a recent experience when she took her son to hospital:

> *'A lot of places I feel you definitely are judged being a young mum. I feel like that in the hospital as well. Even up until recently my son had bumped his head in school and it was really bad, it had come up massive. And they said to me like you know 'he needs to get it checked out it's getting really big.' I took him in there and they're asking me like straight away like, they could see I was young. They said to [son] 'oh who have you bought in with you?' I did laugh at his response, he was like 'my mummy.' As if to say like - who else? So she spoke to him like rather than me… didn't see me as the parent. But it wasn't*

just that, it's like they'll ask questions and I do question it – I think would they question a 40-year-old woman who came in with her child like that?'

Judgments from health professionals were clearly problematic for mothers. Similar to most new parents, young mothers rely on health services for advice and support (Public Health England, 2015). Young mothers in particular benefit from multidisciplinary medical support with benefits including the prevention of adverse pregnancy outcomes such as stress (McCarthy et al. 2014). However, as Smith-Battle (2013) argues, health service providers stigmatizing young mothers can lead to poor caring practices. When discussing health related support with my participants, very few of the mothers were still in contact with their health visitor and stated they would not contact them if they needed advice. Mothers were far more likely to draw on other support services such as those connected to children's centres or other formal support services such as those linked to their housing[82].

While most mothers talked about negative experiences with health professionals, there was a notable exception with the Family Nurse Partnership. Only a small number of my participants (n=3) were engaged with this service but those who were reported feeling supported by the service without negative stigmas. Robyn, 19 who had a 5-month-old daughter was receiving support from both a family nurse practitioner (FNP) and a care leaver adviser (as she had been in care for most of her life). Her care leaver adviser referred her to the Nurse Family Partnership service. Robyn talked positively about her FNP who she said gave her regular support and had encouraged her to access other services despite Robyn's anxiety about going to new places:

'She pops round every two weeks to give advice, she's for [daughter] and me.'

'[Family Practitioner Nurse] is looking into some that are round here, to take [daughter] to one of these groups.'

[82] All of these professionals provided targeted support to young mothers. Support services and how young mothers used them will be explored in Chapter Seven.

Similar to my participants, other research looking at the FNP has reported positive experiences and outcomes including increased self-confidence and empowerment to make positive decisions (see Woodward et al. 2017 for example). These positive experiences reported by mothers highlight the importance of providing targeted services towards this group of women. As I found in my individual interviews, participants valued services designed and delivered just to young mothers (this will be discussed in detail in Chapter Seven).

Research suggests young mothers are highly aware of the negative perceptions people have of them and often feel they have to prove they are capable of parenting (Wenham, 2016). Six of the mothers disclosed current or previous involvement of social services on having children, and all felt they had to present themselves in a certain way and prove themselves to be 'good' mothers. The mothers concerned resented the intervention by social workers. Participants argued they were targeted because of their age and the belief they would not be able to adequately care for their child. Ava was referred to social services by the police who raised concerns about her being pregnant at 15. She found that social workers didn't give her any advice and support and instead asked her questions, such as how she would teach her child to identify different colours, which undermined her:

> *'I don't think they should do that when you're still pregnant cause how are you going to answer questions about how you're going to parent when you don't know? And they're judging whether you're allowed to keep your baby on it.'*

Brooke, 22, whose first child had passed away, felt the involvement of social services with her second child (aged 6 months) was because of her age. She carefully managed her performance to adhere to what she believed social services defined as good mothering practices:

> *'I did feel like I had to prove myself just because of my past being in care and also being young. Because they would not make a 30-year-old woman that had been in care when she was younger do that.'*

Carla who had been in a very abusive relationship with the partner of her first child also had an assigned social worker (because of her ex-partner's previous behaviour). Desperate to tell someone about the abuse she couldn't confide in social services, fearing they would take her child away:

> *'I was scared they were gonna take my child so I was hiding things. Him hitting me, I was hiding that to make sure that they didn't obviously know, he used to smoke drugs as well so I was hiding that.'*

Eventually, Carla was able to tell a support worker whom she was put in contact with and it enabled her to escape her situation.

Adult and social care services are an integral part of local service provision and support. However, their relationship with some young mothers may not be beneficial if the users do not report positive outcomes. As explored in Chapter Two, articles in medical journals often construct teenage pregnancy and motherhood as problematic (see Langille, 2007; Cook and Cameron, 2017 for example). Breheny and Stevens (2009) argue medical journals present young mothers as distinct and different to other mothers, almost always framing them as a social, economic and health concern. Similarly, other research suggests social workers have pre-conceived ideas about young mothers. Rutman et. al (2002) found that social workers had internalised middle class values around mothering and believed young mothers were 'bad' mothers who would inevitably repeat the cycle of deprivation by having children. Thus, having pre-conceived ideas of characteristics of good mothers means social workers may form biased ideas of mothers who do not fit within this category. As explored in Chapter Two, young motherhood is often associated with welfare class attributes such as dependency on social security. Thus, young mothers are far removed from middle class values held by social workers.

Becoming mothers meant my participants lives were very different from other young people with their time dominated by their children's needs rather than their own. This differs considerably from current neo-liberal adolescence discourses that are

concerned with higher education and labour market entry for young people (McRobbie, 2007). Thus, their identity as a young person changes after becoming mothers. Furthermore, my participants argued their lives were very different to that of their peers with them forgoing new relationships and nights out as well as delayed education to focus on their children[83]. While mothers felt they may have had some missed opportunities, overall, they were happy with their choices.

This first section has explored the importance of age in creating stigmatised identities of young mothers. My participants reported stigma from various people, including professionals involved in service delivery. According to Bailey et al. (2004) the biggest risk to young mothers is the lack of access to appropriate care tailored to their needs. Thus, stigmatising behaviour by health professionals may lead to the negative consequences that are often described in the medical literature. For example, research suggests young mothers are less likely to breastfeed (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2012). However, while medical literature may argue it is the age of the mothers that influences breastfeeding, it could arguably be because of stigma. In other words, they actively avoid health care services meaning that they have to draw on other support services for help with this. As explored in Chapter Two research by Hunter et al. (2015) found young mothers find support for breastfeeding difficult to navigate with health professionals catering support to middle-class women.

While age was very important in generating stigma, according to the mothers I interviewed, young fathers or indeed fathers in general were not forced to endure the same kind of response. Therefore, gender as a status was also very important in the generation of stigma for my participants. This will be the focus for the next section.

5.4 Gender and Stigma

[83] Although most mothers were keen to engage in education and/or paid work if they were not already doing so (discussed in Chapter Six).

While age was viewed as being very important in understanding how young mothers were perceived, according to participants, gender was just as important in defining their position. During discussions, mothers argued the negative attitudes expressed about them were not applied to young fathers. As Maria for example noted: *'No one pays attention to young dads.'* These responses by mothers could at least be partly explained by societal attitudes towards young people, sexual activity and responsibility. For example, Ellis-Sloan (2014) argues that there is a particularly negative attitudes towards female participation in sexual activity because it represents a cultural taboo. As my participants argued, they felt subject to stigma because of their age that their male peers would not be. Indeed, surveillance around young people and sexual activity is far greater for women as they are assumed to be responsible for preventing conception (Aapola et al. 2005). This attitude means when young women become mothers, they must take responsibility for 'having given in' and for failing to protect themselves against pregnancy. Indeed, Helen reflected on the 'blame' young women experience on deciding to continue with their pregnancy:

> *'I think it's also a fact that society thinks that if a woman decides to go through with the pregnancy, that's her decision. So in society's eyes they look at the father and they think 'well she's just kinda put this kid on you because she could have done this or she could have done that, she chose to be pregnant for nine months and give birth so you've got it really difficult.' Like I hear people say that and I'm like 'oh my gosh – you obviously haven't met my kid's dad – he hasn't had it difficult.'*

Helen, as well as some of the other participants, felt there were different views concerning young mothers and young fathers with the former receiving far more negative attention. However, despite participant perceptions, a growing body of evidence does suggest that young fathers are also subject to stigma based on their age. According to Hanna (2018) a number of negative stereotypes are attributed to young fathers including being absent from their children's lives and uninterested in their care. Lammy (2018) argues the negative perception of young fathers are promoted within tabloid newspapers; labeling them as 'deadbeat fathers who are too

incompetent and too disinterested to look after their own children' (P.315). Research has also found young fathers face hardships of their own in regards to childrearing such as when finding employment to enable them to support their children (Neale and Davies, 2016), securing a family home (Cundy, 2012), accessing services to support them in their parenting role (Davies and Neale, 2013) and establishing a positive relationship with their child's mother if they are separated (Clayton, 2015). Thus, despite participants' perceptions; research does suggest young fathers are also vulnerable to stigma and hardships. The remainder of this chapter will be concerned with gender and parenthood more broadly.

While there was some discussion on age when considering gender differences and parenting, most of responses were concerned with gendered issues completely unrelated to the age of the mother or the father. Participants felt there were very different attitudes for mothers and fathers, with society constantly judging the behaviour of mothers towards their children. This was particularly true around child responsibility and contact. As Brooke argued:

> *'They're [fathers] allowed to walk away yeah and have their child twice a week and get away with that. Whilst if we did that and had our child twice a week, oh my God, we'd be the bad mum.'*

Maria, 22, who had a two-year-old child, also argued the expectations around herself as the mother and her child's father were very different. Her ex-boyfriend ceased contact when she found out she was pregnant and left her sofa surfing throughout her pregnancy. He has so far, refused to take any responsibility:

> *'Her dad was 24 and he still like, he's meant to be the older man, like and he still walked out and acted like a little boy.'*

Both Brooke and Maria (as well as other mothers in the research) had experiences where the fathers had abandoned them and their child and refused to be involved in their lives. This happened either during the pregnancy or shortly after the child was

born. The mothers noted that they felt targeted and blamed for this separation despite the relationship breakdown not being their choice. As explored in Chapter Two, Portier-Le Conq (2017) found young mothers are often not lone mothers by choice. And yet, as women, they are expected to present themselves in a certain way and have a much higher moral code to adhere to than men do as fathers. Furthermore, my participants also argued the gender divisions between men and women in terms of care for the children and work were relevant for all mothers. This suggests that gender is also key in understanding the identity construction of the young women in my sample. Ivy highlighted that while she wasn't in paid work, being a mother was a '24-hour job', and that unpaid care was often undervalued. She argued that prejudicial attitudes towards women and mothers continued to be a problem:

> *'We need more credit for what we do yeah and they need to start, the limelight needs to start being shown on them [fathers] and what they're like because I just think it's completely sexist. That's the sexist thing that's still going on even though they say like 2018 the year of the woman blah, blah, blah, its not. That is still a real sexist thing that's still going on.'*

Jenna, 22 who had two children, one aged 2 years and the other 6 months also felt there were differences between how men and women were seen in regards to parenting responsibilities. She argued that on becoming parents, the lives of women changed a lot, while the same was not the case for men on becoming fathers. She summarised her feelings:

> *'I find with dads – they still got their life. They can go out, they can do what they like, they can go out when they want. Whereas us mothers have to make sure our kids are fed, bathed, the house is clean, we've done the shopping, the bills are paid. Whereas with them [fathers] it's just 'see you later.'*

Women are generally considered the main caregivers to their children (Coltrane, 2004) and consequently are subject to consequences such as long-term wage

penalties (Stewart, 2014). This is particularly problematic for young women because they are unlikely to have had the time to establish themselves within paid work before pregnancy. While this division of labour is based on numerous factors including cultural ones, there is little recourse for women who are dissatisfied with the situation. Mothers were keen to argue there was little negative attention for absent fathers who had children to support but whom did not work. This is despite legislation stating both parents are responsible for financially supporting their children with even non-resident fathers required to pay as much as the state deems they can afford (Corden, 2001). Financially supporting their child is not legally tied to parental responsibility[84] and even parents who do not have this are required to provide financial support. However, this becomes complicated when two parents separate or when the relationship breaks down. Then mothers must depend on either the father to pay adequate maintenance or the state to enforce payments. Ava lamented the unequal division between separated parents and financial obligations:

> *'The mum is almost always going to be the primary carer and they probably spend all of their money on their kids or at least ninety percent and dads get away with just a fiver a week[85].'*

Thus, despite both parents being legally responsible for their children's needs, according to my participants, in reality it is mothers who are expected to do this and make up for the father when he is absent. According to Baker (2009) there are far greater expectations surrounding motherhood compared to fatherhood. My participants reported often feeling under pressure to prove themselves as good mothers and felt their actions were constantly being examined by others. Mothers further argued fathers were not held accountable in the same way as they were. According to Rizzo et al. (2002) mothers pursue expectations of some ideal notion of good motherhood even if it is not attainable. These pressures are not confined to

[84] Those who have parental responsibility also have other duties such as ensuring their child has a home as set out in the Children Act 1989.
[85] Ava is talking about minimum payments enforceable by the state if the father is claiming certain benefits.

those who are young or parenting alone, they are concerns for all mothers. Furthermore, men are not subject to the same expectations (Asher, 2011). As explored in Chapter Two, young mothers cannot live up to the good motherhood ideal because they have so many attributes, such as they age and their social class that excludes them.

While some of the young mothers argued that young fathers would not be subject to the same stigma as them as a consequence of age, research with this group of young men suggest otherwise. More widely, participants reported they felt there were different expectations concerning motherhood and fatherhood with mothers having to live up to greater moral and social standards and were subjected to greater shame if they failed to do so. These expectations are not always related to age and instead are burdens for all mothers. The next section will add another dimension to my participants' identity: the stigma of being lone mothers.

5.5 Lone motherhood and Stigma

As noted in my methodology the difficulty in recruiting my participants meant I interviewed a number of mothers who currently had partners. However, most of the mothers (n=22) were lone parents[86] and this was a particularly strong characteristic in terms of stigma and identity. The following section will explore how being a single parent impacts on the lives of mothers.

My participants identified with and discussed their lone parent status in a number of ways. Some of the mothers reflected on their experiences at the Job Centre, where they were required to attend on an ad hoc basis to discuss how they would approach employment once their child started school. For lone parents who are solely responsible for the care of their children, the lack of help from the absent father means it is harder for them to enter and retain paid work before their children go to school and even then, it can be problematic. Most of the mothers I interviewed were

[86] As defined in Chapter Four.

in receipt of Income Support (IS) meaning they were subject to conditions imposed by the Job Centre. Their experiences with advisers were mostly negative, with mothers reporting stigma based mainly on their status as lone mothers. Maria reported her lone parent status was the result of her child's father deciding not be involved and they separated shortly after she told him about her pregnancy. Although it was the father who left Maria, she found herself being judged at the Job Centre:

> *'See I went to the job centre last year and I said that I couldn't go back to work cause it was just me, I'm a single mum and the guy said 'well can't her dad have her?' And I said 'well her dad's not around.' And then I just felt like his whole attitude then changed towards me.'*

Ella, similar to Maria had experienced a relationship breakdown when she found out she was pregnant with her first child. She summed up her experiences at the Job Centre:

> *'Oh they just think another lone mum at home doing nothing.'*

Brooke explained the attitudes towards lone parents made her very angry. She felt that people made it their business to make comments but argued they: 'don't know the situation.' The father of her child had separated from her while she was pregnant and had decided not to be involved in the child rearing process. Despite working, he did not pay child maintenance and Brooke argued that all the stigma was directed at her as a lone parent who didn't work, despite wanting to:

> *'I just think the law should change some way because my child's father works and he can work full time. And I wanna work full time but I can't cause I'm stuck looking after his child all the time when really – the law should look at it in a way where you know, they should sort it out and they should get dads to do half of what we do so we can go out and work as well – not just them. Because that's mostly what it is – because we have to look after the children*

all the time. While they can go out and work and we're the ones that get looked down upon and I don't think it's fair.'

Expectations concerning lone mothers and work are governed far more closely than their married or cohabiting counterparts. As the sole earner in a family, lone mothers are expected to engage in paid work to support their children with little consideration around the difficulties they face and their own individual choices. As explored in Chapter Three, lone mothers claiming income support (IS) as subject to conditions regarding the age of their youngest child. Currently, mothers claiming IS must be moved on to job seekers allowance (JSA) once their youngest child turns five. Claiming JSA means mothers are subject to work requirements and they must seek employment for at least 16 hours a week (Johnsen, 2014). Under universal credit, there are even stricter conditions attached with lone mothers expected to look for employment of 16 hours each week once their youngest child turns three and 25 hours as week once their youngest child turns five (DWP, 2019a). This suggests policy makers want lone mothers in paid work as soon as possible with little understanding of the demands of their unpaid caring responsibilities. Research has shown that mothers deeply value caring and spending time with their children (Burchardt and Le Grand, 2002) but how lone mothers manage this is not considered within social security or economic policy (Rafferty and Wiggan, 2011). As Brooke argued above, when the child's father is not involved in any caring responsibilities, this makes it much harder for women to access paid employment even when they want to.

In addition to experiences around paid work, mothers also reported cultural perceptions concerning their lone motherhood status. Nina, 18 who had a 10-month old son had a similar story to many of the other participants. Her child's father had also separated from her while she was pregnant and she reported being both young and single left her vulnerable to stigma from both of these statuses. She talked about her experiences of the media:

'I don't see anything good in the media about young mums. I mean I'm on quite like a see-saw kind of thing cause I'm a young mum and I'm a single

mum so I kind of get it from both sides. But you never see anything good, you always hear about the person that neglected their kid or the person who decided to buy this Gucci coat and her kid's starving to death in the corner. Oh by the way – she's 19 so then everyone thinks 'every 19 year old single mum starves their kids to get a new coat.''

Helen agreed with Nina's interpretation of the media and also highlighted some of her direct experiences of attitudes people held towards her. She argued much of this prejudice was based on knowledge they gathered from newspapers and television programmes:

'Someone always has an opinion. And sometimes it's like positive and I do get praise like I get a lot of people saying 'oh my God you're a single mum at your age, like fair play' and that's quite nice. But the negative always outweighs that 'cause I can't even walk through Tesco without someone deciding to let me know what they're thinking of me. Everybody sees you as having no one to lean on. And because you're a single mum, you're so incapable and so emotionally unstable and you probably don't know who the dad is because you're so young and people look at you and are like 'you've got no one to lean on' and you don't have that second parent to have an impact on your child – so what hope has that child got?'

These comments from mothers suggest they are aware of the stigma surrounding lone motherhood and have experienced this first hand. While some of the prejudicial beliefs are linked to youth (suggesting an intersection between the status of young and lone mothers) others, particularly around work and benefits are very much targeted at lone mothers.

As discussed in Chapter Two, proponents of New Right arguments support the promotion of the nuclear family as the 'best family type' in addition to targeting them through policy in the 1980 and early 1990's and this has contributed to the framing of lone mothers as inadequate parents. The promotion of marriage continues to be

important in the delivery of policy including through the Married Couples Tax Allowance (explored in Chapter Three) and the targeting on lone mothers through the Troubled Families Programme (explored in Chapter Two). While societal attitudes towards lone mothers have become more accepting, they continue to be seen as an inferior family type with 64 per cent of British adults arguing that the lack of a father in the household is a serious problem (Centre for Social Justice, 2017). Furthermore, young lone mothers' status is often linked to benefit dependency which has it's own associated stigma (discussed in the next section).

As mentioned previously in this chapter, relationship breakdown for lone mothers had either been a consequence of the father of their child choosing not to be involved or, as in the case of three mothers, because of domestic violence. If this and the associated stigma of lone motherhood wasn't difficult enough for mothers, some of them also reported feeling 'blamed' for the father not being involved. As Maria explained:

> *'A lot of people judge me for it. Like I get people saying to me all the time – 'why don't you let him see her?' and I'm just like he's had his chances like, its not me, its him, he's choosing to walk past us on the street, that's his problem.'*

Maria argued that being a young mum was always viewed as negative but being a young lone parent was even worse. As she summarised: '*I'm a young mum, but I'm a young mum with no dada.'* Maria was not alone in feeling she was blamed for her lone parenthood status. These responses by mothers suggest assumptions are made about the reason for them parenting alone and similarity to age and gender, the women have little control over this status.

This section has explored the role of lone parenthood in generating stigma. Parenting without a partner and claiming income support (IS) means young mothers are subject to rules and regulations concerning work that other mothers are not. The status of being a lone parent exposes young mothers to external judgment as their status is seen as undermining traditional family norms. Rarely do externals ask why mothers

become lone parents focusing instead on blaming them for their status. Some of the stigma reserved for lone mothers is concerned with their perceived reliance on welfare. The next section will explore this is more detail.

5.6 Social Class and Stigma

As discussed in Chapter Two, my exploration of class was concerned with the culturally conceived idea of a 'welfare class. All but one[87] of the women I interviewed received either housing benefit or IS.[88] Most were in receipt of both and reported feeling stigmatised because of this. Furthermore, the literature presented in Chapter Two suggests young mothers are more likely to be from impoverished backgrounds and are likely to be poor as mothers. Therefore, social class and poverty are important considerations when understanding young lone motherhood identity. This final section concerning stigma and status will explore social class with both women and mothers being the focus of discussion.

Most of the mothers I interviewed were not currently engaged within the labour market and as their children were under five, they were entitled to IS. Accessing this benefit came with its own stigma and mothers were acutely aware of the attitudes around young mothers claiming benefits. Participants felt people held stereotypical views around mothers not in work and did not appreciate their individual circumstances and the barriers they faced to paid employment. The mothers argued that this ignorance often led to inaccurate stereotypes. Brooke gave a good example of this:

> *'And they think – oh you're a young mum, you're just having kids just so you don't have to work, do you know what I mean? When they don't know the situation.'*

[87] As noted in Chapter Three, this mother was working and not receiving HB as she was living with her parents.
[88] Or the Universal Credit equivalent.

Carla also argued people often assumed she didn't work – even though she was in paid employment. Her first child, a daughter, was conceived while she was in a relationship characterised by domestic violence but she felt people assumed she had her children just to claim benefits:

> *'Not all people do have children for money. I didn't have children for money. Obviously my daughter, I wanted her, but I thought having her in a bad relationship would make it better. Obviously I wouldn't change having her. And my son was sort of planned. I'm not having my children just for money. I wouldn't care if I had no money.'*

There is considerable overlap between assumed characteristics of young mothers and those belonging to the welfare class. This social category (as identified in Chapter Four) refers to those viewed as welfare dependent by refusing to engage in paid work, not contributing to the system via taxes and claiming as many benefits from the state as they can (Hills, 2015). Similar to the welfare class, it is assumed that young mothers actively choose to reject paid work, to depend on the state (Campion, 1995) and to take part in a variety of other deviant behaviours (Bonell, 2011). My participants argued people make assumptions about their employment status, without considering the complex circumstances they find themselves in. While participants recognised that they were stigmatised by others as a consequence of claiming benefits, they did not use derogatory language to describe themselves. This is in contrast to other research that has found welfare recipients sometimes internalise some of the labels applied to them (Patrick, 2016).

Many of the mothers I interviewed were also keen to engage in education as soon as they could, and some were already doing so. During the interviews I asked mothers what they thought their lives would be like in five years and most responded they wanted to be engaged within the labour market. Those pursuing education felt this was the best route to meaningful employment and the ability to provide for their children. Ava who gave birth to her daughter six weeks before we met was very keen to get back into education and wanted to study art. Many of the mothers were

inspired by the birth of their children to achieve and become successful. Evie who had her son at 19 and was currently in her second year at university told me having her son inspired her to pursue higher education[89]. The attitudes and ambitions of young mothers contradicts the ethos behind welfare dependency and the idea that those claiming benefits do so by choice and intend to access them indefinitely. Indeed, rather than giving up on developing themselves through education and training, having children often encourages young parents to engage more with educational institutions (Duncan, 2005).

In reality, most of my participants struggled to get by on their limited incomes, with some mothers reporting that they had accessed additional support through the Social Fund and charities when they needed it. This had not always been easy for them and they reported being stigmatised. Emma who had used a food bank shortly after her daughter was born found she had to justify this:

> *'People are looking at me and stereotyping me and saying 'oh you are a young mum, you shouldn't be having a baby if you are having to go to food banks.' But the only reason why I am going to a food is because I am providing for my baby and putting my baby first.'*

Young mothers accessing food banks will be subject to the same stigma and shame that those accepting food aid report (Purdam et al. 2015). Thus, young mothers are stigmatised for claiming benefits and then stigmatised again for seeking additional support when their money is not enough to support them and their children.
My participants were very aware of how claiming benefits affected the views of others. Maria was keen to ensure her child was always well-presented and wearing nice clothes. She felt that such a presentation would ensure that people knew her daughter was well looked after and would deflect any negative comments. She described an experience recently when a group of young men she knew vaguely had said they *'didn't think your child would look like that.'* When Maria pushed them for

[89] Their experiences will be explored in Chapter Six.

an explanation of why they had said this, she was told that she was on benefits and therefore they did not expect her daughter to have nice clothes. Those on a low-income face greater public scrutiny regarding their choice in purchases because they are seen as undeserving of having 'nice' items (Fahmy et al., 2012). At the same time research suggests that those on a low income will attempt to conceal their poverty (Reutter et al. 2009). For Maria, her low income meant she was vulnerable to being judged by how she spent her money but her behaviour suggested she was more concerned about the stigmatised perceptions others might have of her daughter and herself as a mother. Thus, her choice of clothes for her child was influenced by what she thought others might think of her and how she might be judged.

This approach to preventing stigma is an example of performance management as proposed by Goffman (1990a). Maria's consumer choices for her daughter's clothes were influenced by her need to present her daughter and herself in a particular way. Being aware of the stigma attached to claiming benefits, Maria was attempting to mitigate this before it happened. By demonstrating she is able to provide her daughter with nice things, Maria is presenting herself as a 'good' mother who wants her daughter to have nice things. By dressing her daughter in certain clothes, this would prevent the stigma of poverty and of being part of the welfare class that might otherwise be applied to them both.

Claire, one of the practitioners, also reported that young mothers engage in performance management when choosing clothes for their children. Working in a children's centre and with young mums, she described how young mothers mitigate against certain prejudices:

> *'A lot of these young parents try especially hard to make sure their child is better dressed or they have the nicest pram.'*

Claire gave the following example:

'She was saying how her child had a fifty-pound tracksuit on… she was like 'she has to look nice' and I think for them they don't want to get judged so they go overboard.'

Ivy reflected on her income and the perceptions of others, arguing:

'I find that cause you're a young mum you work even more hard to make sure your kid looks a certain way cause you're gonna get looked at.'

This comment by Ivy supports Claire's observation of how young lone mothers present their children to the public. These behaviours suggest mothers are keen to mitigate the labels attached to benefit stigma and this is often done by presenting their children in particular ways. In their work Nayak and Kehily (2014) argue that the 'chav identity' has become synonymous with the welfare class and note how some young mothers embrace this identity but reject the negative stigma associated with it such as poverty. To enable young mothers to reject the poverty attached to the 'chav' identity, the researchers found they engaged in consumption and rejected items such as second-hand clothes, something they associated with needing if you were poor. According to Hamilton (2011) low-income families will attempt to hide their poverty by engaging in consumer culture and carefully select the clothes they wear and the food they eat. These studies support the findings from this research. Those on low incomes do not want to be subject to stigma because of the poverty and engage in performance management to prevent this. Young mothers use performance management to mitigate against stigma and present themselves as socially acceptable, 'good' mothers.

Helen found her physical appearance led to a number of assumptions about the care of her daughter and how she spent her money:

'I mean I've got a lot of tattoos and I pride my make up, I do my make up every day even if I feel like I'm gonna die; even more so, I'm just plastering it on them days. And I get it a lot, people saying 'look at her, look at how many tattoos

she's got. How can she spend more money on her tattoos than on her child?' But it's like – no, I got the majority of the tattoos before I even had her and the ones I have got now are literally presents; I'm no where near as fast paced with them as I was before I had her. And then it's like 'oh look at those trainers.' I literally had someone comment on what I was wearing and saying 'how can she afford trainers like that with a child 'cause she obviously doesn't work.' It's like – no I don't work, I didn't even buy my trainers, my mum did.'

By assuming Helen spent her money on what might be considered non-necessities such as tattoos and by assuming she doesn't work, she is being stigmatised based on her belonging to the welfare class. Labels such as these are often applied to those experiencing poverty. For example, in response to the rise in food banks former Conservative MP Edwina Curry argued that people accessing the banks used their benefits for items such as tattoos at the expense of food (Alexander, 2014). However, research has consistently made links between food banks and financial insecurity fueled by welfare reform including the introduction of universal credit and precarious low-paid work (see Caplan, 2016; Wainwright et al. 2018; The Trussell Trust, 2018). Not working and claiming benefits adds to the already stigmatised identities of young lone mothers. These ideas are closely related to my participants' interpretation of what was described by Helen as the *'textbook'* mother and the idea about paid work being important to the image of the 'good' mother. Mothers are stigmatised based on their welfare class in two ways. The first is related to them not being in work and claiming benefits, and the second is related to spending their benefits on themselves rather than their children. However, as the comments from my participants in Chapter Six will demonstrate, the latter assumption about them does not reflect reality. Instead, mothers strive to put their children first and often have to go without necessities themselves.

According to Frampton (2010), working-class young mothers are more likely to be framed negatively than young mothers from middle class families who instead evoke sympathy. This suggests if young women have material resources at their disposal, they are less likely to need state support and consequently, the same stigma does not

apply. This suggests that while age, gender and lone motherhood are important for identity construction and the allocation of stigma amongst this group, social class is also central. If young mothers have the support from a wealthy family, they will not need to claim benefits or access charitable support such as food banks. Young mothers therefore not only avoid the stigma of benefit dependency but also avoid having to engage with services and be within social situations that can lead to stigma.

This section has explored the importance of social class and the stigma attached to reliance on welfare. Claiming benefits and other social assistance means mothers have to tell their stories to others when they ask for help; leaving them open to criticisms. Mothers respond to this by deflecting labels of poverty by presenting their children in certain ways and talking about their ambitions of education and work. As this section has shown the rhetoric around class is intrinsically linked to gender, lone motherhood and young motherhood. The final part of this chapter will consider how each of these stigmatised social characteristics impact on attitudes towards young mothers, how they respond to these perceptions of them, and how they manage their behaviour (or not in some circumstances) in response.

5.7 Presenting the Young Lone Mother: The Social Process of Stigma and Young Mothers' Responses

This section will bring together the discussions around stigma. Drawing on the responses of the participants presented in this chapter, I will apply Irving Goffman's (1990a and 1990b) theory on stigma and consider how mothers manage their identity in response to the cultural and personal stigma they experience. Understanding the social process of stigma for my participants was important because their lives are constructed and lived within the social environment with experiences of stigma coming from a number of social actors such as health and social care practitioners. In addition, I will also consider my participants' own views about their motherhood identity and argue, despite the stigma they experience, they have a very positive sense of self as young mothers.

According to Goffman, people are constantly presenting themselves to an audience through a well-managed performance with the hope of inciting a particular response. This performance can be affected by the presence of stigma for that person. Goffman gives a broad definition of stigma as 'an attribute that is deeply discrediting' (1990b:3)[90]. As this chapter has demonstrated, my participants are associated with a number of attributes that 'discredit' them as mothers. The model of stigma created by Goffman considers both the social and psychological elements of stigma (Kleinman and Hall-Clifford, 2009). Therefore, this approach is appropriate to my research because it allows me to explore the social process of labelling and stigma, it's impact and how my participants managed it.

According to Goffman, stigma is the consequence of a gap between what a person should be (known as the virtual social identity) and what a person actually is (known as actual social identity). For my participants this refers to the difference between a cultural definition of what mothers should be (older, married and not in need of state support) and who they actually are (young, unmarried and in receipt of certain benefits). As set out in Chapter Two, there are three different types of stigma: 'abominations of the body, 'blemishes of individual character' and 'tribal.'

While these young women did not have the physical abnormalities that Goffman proposed (including noticeable physical differences) as they were women and they were young; they did have physical characteristics that were subject to stigma within the context of motherhood. Madison, 19, who had a 1-year-old son talked about her observation of mothers who attended children centres and how she felt her youth automatically identified her as different:

> *'I think it's just because when you go in there and you see most of the mums are like normal age you do feel a bit like different.'*

[90] This work was originally published in 1963.

Carla also identified her physical appearance as being a source of stigma and distinction from other mothers:

> *'I have got really bad looks, mainly since I've had my son like pushing a double pram. I see that people look at me and I've heard people talking 'oh look another young mum – with two kids' kind of thing. Basically thinking I'm trying to get more benefits, having children for money.'*

Carla's comment includes a number of physical characteristics. The 'young mother' encompasses her youth and gender but she also talks about this status being linked to her social class. Assuming she was having children just to claim benefits highlights how physical abnormalities, in this case being a young mother, can lead to stigma associated with social class. Mothers also made direct links to their social class and physical appearance.

In the previous section I considered the role of social class in identity construction and discussed the 'chav' identity, a status associated with poverty. Maria talked about the clothes she wore and argued people stigmatised her based on this:

> *'See I like dress in as they call it 'a chav' like I'm always in brands, I've got joggers on, all these big hoop earrings and things. So not only am I a young mum whose single, I'm also dressed like that so you get judged straight away.'*

These comments by mothers suggest that age, gender and social class are important in generating stigma associated with physical abnormalities. Their physical abnormalities, which in this sense refer to their youth, gender and social class are 'on show' and these women are vulnerable to stigma based on both of these social characteristics. Once identified as young mothers, my participants are also subject to labels based on other associated statuses such as claiming benefits. Despite them not having physical deformities such as a disability that would be typical when applying stigma (see Bailey et al. 2016 for example), their youth and gender in the context of motherhood are presented as 'deformities' of the body.

While age is central to understanding how young mothers are identified and stigmatised, gender and social class are also important. Mothers in this research argued fathers are not subject to the same negative attention meaning their statuses as women is highly relevant. As explored in Chapter Two, the construction of female identity is primarily concerned with motherhood but at the same time having children should be confined to a certain time in a woman's life. According to Betterton (2009), although pregnancy and child rearing are a personal experience, the maternal body is public property and therefore subject to expectations and constraints. One such expectation concerns the appropriate time to have children and this is embedded within ideas about women and labour market demands (Wilson and Huntington, 2005) and wider neo-liberal discourses (Daguerre and Nativel, 2006). As explored in Chapter Two, young women have emerged as the ideal citizen, with potential to contribute to the economy using their skills and qualifications rather than relying on the state (Harris, 2004). Consequently, while young women will always be identified as 'future' mothers because they are women, they should not be current mothers because of their youth. Their youth should instead be a symbol of success in education and the labour market rather than associated with pregnancy and claiming benefits. However, these 'physical abnormalities' need to be understood within the context of motherhood. The mothers in this research are clearly identifiable by their appearance, assuming their children accompany them. If their status as a young mother is unknown, the stigmas described by the young mothers based on their physical appearance will not apply in the same way.

This stigmatising of young mothers has contributed to the blemishes of character (Goffman, 1990b) assigned to them. Existing constructions of teenage pregnancy and motherhood present the status of one of individual failure (Brethany and Stephens, 2009). As explored already in this chapter, from their individual interactions with others including health professionals, my participants reported feeling judged. Furthermore, as my participants argued, they also felt blamed for the status of being 'lone' mothers, even though it was usually the father of their child who left them. Thus, mothers are blamed for failing to keep the family together. As they are young, parenting alone and poor, these mothers are 'morally tainted' (Kelly, 2000:83)

meaning they are perceived to have behaved in the wrong way by getting pregnant and continue to behave badly while parenting.

Both television progarmmes and newspapers often use derogatory language to describe young mothers and present them as unfit parents (Hadfield et al. 2007). Additionally, the media targets those in receipt of social security benefits portraying them as 'scroungers' with little concern of the lived experiences of those struggling on the small incomes social security provides (Patrick, 2015). According to Jensen (2014) a new genre often referred to a 'poverty porn' has sought to portray benefit claimants in highly stigmatised ways with the intention to create public debate around welfare dependency. These include television shows such as Benefits Street[91], Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole[92] and How to get a Council House[93]. The participants in this research also argued that the presentation of them via media outlets contributes to the blemishes attached to young lone motherhood through examples of media framing. Brooke talked about the TV show Teen Mum UK (a programme following the lives of young mothers, their relationships and their children for the purpose of entertainment) and their presentation of this group of mothers:

> *'Reckless, unstable relationships, umm cause I remember seeing that on Teen Mum UK and it really pissed me off because all it was basically showing was unstable relationships, cheating on people. Basically we're young kids who haven't grown up and that we don't think about our children. That's what the media portray us as.'*

[91] Benefits Street was broadcast for two seasons on Channel 4 between 2014 and 2015. It focused on a number of residents who lived on the same street, were unemployed and claimed benefits.
[92] Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole ran for two seasons on Channel 5 between 2014 and 2015. Each week three individuals/families would appear on an episode which was centred around a particular family type (for example, single parent families) or a particular event (for example, shopping for Christmas while on benefits).
[93] How to get a Council House was broadcast on Chanel 4 between 2013 and 2016. It focused on different case studies each week of impoverished families attempting to access social housing.

Helen also drew on examples in the media to illustrate perceived characteristics of young lone mothers:

> *'I think the media has like a massive thing. You got bloody Jeremy Kyle 'kids having kids' and media comes up with all these little quirky statements that people then just latch on to. And that one young parent who left her child outside the shop – all of us must do that. Cause we're all young and we're all the same. So I think the media is just a massive tarnish on young parents.'*

According to mothers, newspapers and TV shows portray them all in particular ways, i.e as incapable parents who are too young to have children and aren't able to look after them. These blemishes also contribute to further removing these young women from the cultural perception of the 'good' mother. When I asked my participants in the first focus groups if they could define what a 'good' mother was, I was told there was 'no such thing.' However, they did concede society had views on what it means to be a good mother and this included not indulging in drink, always going to bed at 10pm, dressing children in fancy clothes, being in paid employment, managing employment and childcare, married and in her 30's. In the other focus group mothers also argued that society has a certain view of mothers. Helen gave this summary:

> *'She's the one who is written about in textbooks. She's about 35, 36; her child doesn't cry, it sleeps all night, it doesn't get ill because she does everything perfectly fine. She's tip-top, she's got a full time working job but somehow spends everyday with her child because she has to spend everyday with her child otherwise she doesn't look after it. She's rich because how dare she bring a child into the world without any money. She has 28 hours in a 24 hour day.'*

Mothers in both focus groups further argued that pressure to conform to these expectations was not relevant in the same way for fathers. By not living up to what Helen described as the 'textbook' mother, the mothers in my research were subject to prejudice. Goffman's categories of stigma can be applied to the lives of these

women who were subject to physical, tribal and blemished of character types. However, their management of this stigma seldom involved trying to conceal it. Young mothers belong to a number of social groups based on their various statuses. These group memberships mean they are subject to tribal stigma. As single mothers, they present an alternative family form and are subject to the long-standing prejudices attached to lone motherhood. These mothers are seen as irresponsible, undeserving of help and by claiming benefits are seen as being distinct citizens who have a different moral code (Lister, 1996). This group of women is also seen as deviating from the traditional journey between youth to adulthood (Whitehead 2001). They become a distinct group of young people by having children rather than engaging in societal expectations of training and the labour market (Wilson and Huntington, 2005). As women, their sexual activities receive greater scrutiny than their male counterparts with mothers shouldering the blame for conception (Aapola et al. 2005). Thus, they are forced to manage a number of stigmatised identities, often at the same time. As well as belonging to all these groups, young lone motherhood is also a distinct identity. Thus, stigmas that encompass class, disadvantage, marital status and gender are generally applied to all young mothers as they are often wrongly assumed to be a homogenous group (Macvarish and Billings, 2010). The combination of these statuses led to the creation of a 'spoiled identity' for young lone mothers. This type of identity, according to Goffman, refers to people who experience stigma based on certain traits.

As a consequence of their spoiled identity when engaging with audiences my participants were forced to use 'face work' (Ellis-Sloan, 2014:9). The concept of face work is based on Goffman's ideas of 'face' that refers to how we present ourselves in certain situations depending on the rules and values of that current context. Engaging with their audiences involved using face work by ensuring the presentation of the self was consistent and fitted with external positive images of good motherhood. The mothers in my research were aware they always had an audience watching both them and their children. At any moment a member of the audience could question them about their behaviour. Ivy talked the constant surveillance she experienced and felt under pressure with others watching on:

'Like after school, they've had a hectic day and they're like playing up. Then you get like all the older mums just like looking and down at you like 'if you can't control you kids, you shouldn't have had 'em.' I had it the other day is Tesco. My kid ran off and I got told I was having the social called on me cause my kids running off. And I'm just like 'oh right ok cheers.''

Mothers also used performance management to ensure they were presented to their audiences using appeasing behaviours that audiences would identify as 'good' mothering. Mothers did this by ensuring both they and their children were well presented and they acted appropriately with certain services such as when in the presentence of social workers. These actions included: hiding their experience of domestic violence and explaining how they would teach their child to identify different colours.

Goffman's work has already been applied to young mothers in some modern settings. Ellis-Sloan (2014) applied Goffman's ideas around stigma to teenage parents. She found mothers used impression management to present themselves in a way that was agreeable to herself as the researcher to others. While my research also found young mothers use performance management for professionals and even in public, I did not find they did so to me as the researcher. In my presence, mothers engaged in behaviours that I felt would result in stigma and condemnation from others. I noted some of these within my journal such as giving their child a chocolate bar for breakfast, smoking with their children present or wearing pajamas in the afternoon. This lack of performance management in front of me may be linked to my former status as a teenage mother and therefore some sense that I could identify with them. Indeed, some of the mothers asked me if I had felt stigmatised as a young parent and a few noted they felt comfortable talking to someone who understood their situation. As Maria noted: *'You were a young mum, I bet you wouldn't judge us.'* My participants also argued they felt more comfortable engaging with practitioners who didn't judge them and had a good understanding of their needs. In most cases, this was the practitioner who acted as the gatekeepers to my sample. This suggests young

mothers feel less pressure to 'perform' in front of audiences who they don't believe will stigmatise them.

While Goffman argued people often try to hide their status to avoid stigma, I did not find this to always be the case for my participants. One reasons for this might be because their physical abnormality of youth combined with motherhood is difficult to disguise when their children are with them. However, it could also be because young mothers in this research adopted a coping mechanism where they justified their position as mothers through positive rhetoric. This was done in two ways: the first focused on traditional expectations of 'good' mothering with participants rejecting this image of motherhood that, according to them, is based on a cultural concept that does not exist in reality. They argued instead that every mother has her own way of parenting. The second approach of the participants was to justify their own status as mothers stating that age is not an important factor when bringing up children. Throughout the interviews, mother emphasised their positive (and culturally acceptable) behaviours as parents with a focus on child-wellbeing, on their journey to build a good life for themselves, and the sacrifices they had willingly made to benefit their children. They also argued that there are many advantages to being both young and lone parents that are rarely considered by the professionals and the public. This approach by young mothers has been referred to as the 'good motherhood identity' (McDermott and Graham, 2005:59). Faced with negative perceptions, my participants responded by arguing that as young mothers they were likely to be in better health for longer, to have more energy to care for their children, and to have more in common with them because there is less generational difference. There were also positives about being lone mothers. Some of my participants were domestic violence survivors and they argued their children were much better off outside of such violent environments. Others pointed to the close bond they had developed with their child as it was 'just the two' of them. Some mothers also reported parenting alone had increased their confidence and self-esteem because their child's positive outcomes could be attributed to them. Additionally, mothers also argued that not engaging in the labour market (even if it meant having to claim benefits) was important to allow them to spend time with their children. The mothers in my research also commented

that in addition to the negative stigma, there was little credit given for their difficult position and the good job they did in raising their children.

Interestingly, mothers believed that even as they grew older and entered their 30's, they would still be stigmatised. They argued their position as young mothers would form part of their status forever and the associated labels would be attached to them indefinitely. Their youth therefore acts as an enduring stigma to their status as mothers and will always be part of their identity. Arguably, they could escape the label of lone mother through partnership although this was not the current agenda for most mothers who were content in parenting alone. Despite engaging in performance management to appease certain audiences and deflect stigma, overall, the discussions with mothers suggested they have a positive sense of self and value their status as young lone mothers. They resisted these by arguing the stigmas did not reflect reality, by challenging traditional notions of 'good motherhood' and by emphasising their ability as 'good' mothers.

Despite mothers' positive sense of self, we cannot ignore the social context young mothers often find themselves in. Their status as young, lone, poor mothers is highly stigmatised and they find themselves having to perform to certain audiences to enable them to deflect negative perceptions of them as mothers. Furthermore, they engage in behaviours such as avoiding certain places including children's centres and visits with health professionals because they fear the stigma created by certain interactions. Therefore, while young mothers do have a positive sense of self, their identities are highly constrained within a hostile environment towards them.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the different statuses of my participants and discussed the stigma attached to each of these. Using the voices of this group of women, I have considered how they understand stigma and prejudice within their lives and how young lone mothers respond to these. The experience of stigma amongst this group of women has been identified by other studies (see Kirkman et al 2001; Whitley and

Kirmayer, 2008' Wenham, 2016 for example). However, previous research has generally focused on the age of these mothers and not recognised how other statuses intersect to create stigmatised identities. I sought to address this gap in knowledge by using intersectionality in my analysis. By identifying and separating different social statuses, this research found young mothers are subject to stigma based not only on their youth but also their gender, social class and their status as lone parents. The statuses intersect to create unique stigmatised identities for this group of women. My findings suggest understanding stigma amongst young mothers is more complicated than looking solely at their age. The various sources of stigma demonstrate the importance of using intersectionality to understand stigma and identity.

Research suggests young mothers are subject to stigma from a variety of social actors including the general public (Yardley, 2008); their peers (Alldred and David, 2010) and professionals such as doctors and social workers (Fessler, 2008; Brethany and Stevens, 2007). The attitudes of these actors are reflected in the media (Hadfield et al. 2007), policy (Aria, 2009) and medical literature discourses (Brethany and Stevens, 2009). The participants in this research cited similar sources of stigma from a variety of people, including professionals whom they had contact with. Young mothers lead very public lives, their image is dissected by a number of stakeholders who consider them a homogenous group of women who, because of their age, social class and because they are parenting alone, cannot be 'good' mothers. Goffman's (1990a; 1990b) argument that stigma is a consequence between the 'gap' of the virtual social identity and the actual social identity (in other words what a person should be compared to what they actually are) is important for understanding why stigma is allocated to young mothers. As a highly valued institution (Silva, 1996) motherhood demands a particular virtual social identity characterised by partnership and ideally marriage (Walbank, 2001), financial security (Wilson and Huntington, 2005) and being of a socially acceptable age (Bailey et al 2002). Their actual identity – as lone, poor, young mothers mean they are subject to stigma because of this 'gap.'

Participants had a sound understanding of how others viewed them and drew on examples of criticisms based on age, gender, lone motherhood and social class to

support their narratives. While young mothers acknowledge these perceptions, they reject these labels perhaps not directly by challenging those stigmatising them but instead by focusing on some of the positives of youthful mothering such as having better health as their children are growing up. This approach to rejecting stigma is common amongst young mothers who instead focus on creating their own 'good motherhood identity' (McDermott and Graham, 2005 P.59). Mothers were also forced to engage in 'face work' (Eliis-Sloan, 2014:9) where they would use certain performance techniques to mitigate negative perceptions of themselves. Mothers stressed the need to convince others they could provide a solid and loving environment for their children. According to my participants, even in their 30's they would still be identified as 'young' mothers. This reinforces the importance of social background within stigma construction and reproduction. Stigma lingers long after an individual's status changes. The negative stigma attached to young motherhood may therefore shape the lives of these women indefinitely. Although, it should be noted, cohabitation or marriage may mitigate against their lone parent status and stable employment against welfare receipt.

The next chapter will consider how young, lone mothers experience their lives with the context of austerity and welfare reform. Exploring the areas of housing, income, budgeting, benefits, employment and education, I intend to present the lives of young mothers within the current context. Once again drawing on their voices to inform the findings, this analysis will contribute to the understanding of the lives of my participants as young, lone mothers.

Chapter Six

Dimensions of Young Lone Motherhood

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored how different social statuses influence the identity construction of young mothers. I also considered the stigma experienced by my participants and how this is related to each of their defined statuses. This chapter will develop a greater understanding of the lives of this disadvantaged group of young women. Once again, making the voices of my participants central to the findings, I explore how their lives are affected by a number of dimensions. i.e. - housing, money, employment and education. These areas were the focal points of discussions with participants i) because much of the young mothers lives revolve around these issues, ii) because these issues formed part of the former Teenage Pregnancy Strategy agenda and iii) because these areas had all been subject to change as a consequence of austerity and welfare reform policy. The themes explored in this chapter are informed by the discussions within the individual interviews.[94]

6.2 A House isn't always a Home: Pathways of Accommodation

Housing was a major focus within the interviews conducted with my participants, with most mothers being unsatisfied with their current living arrangements. As young mothers are likely to live in poverty (Bradshaw, 2006a), they have very limited access to the housing market. Most of the young women in my research had become mothers while either at school or shortly after leaving school meaning they had no time to save money or establish themselves in their own home.

The lack of financial resources available to my participants meant their housing options were limited and all were either dependent on their family or the state to

[94] There is no data from the focus group interviews within this chapter as the themes identified are based on very personal accounts and were not addressed within the focus groups.

meet their housing needs. It will become clear within this section that the route to permanent housing for mothers is complex with some reporting rough sleeping and being placed in unsuitable hostels while pregnant. Even after having their child, most mothers were forced to endure problematic housing situations such as overcrowding and disrepair issues. Discussions with participants highlighted the insecurity of their lives with little recourse available to them if they are dissatisfied with their current housing status. Two themes consistently emerged from the interviews. The first was mothers considered their current housing arrangements as temporary, with almost all mothers looking for alternative accommodation. The second theme concerned their long term housing needs with mothers searching for a home that was both permanent and as well as adequate.[95]

I have organized this section into three parts based on the following participants' accommodation status: a) living with other family members, b) living in temporary accommodation, and c) living in permanent accommodation (most often social housing). This enables me to consider living arrangements, housing pathways, and the various issues mothers identify with each accommodation arrangement.

6.2.1 Living with other Family Members

Similar to other young people, young mothers are likely to live in the family home with around 90 per cent of those under 20 doing so (Portier-Le Cocg, 2017). The report on Teenage Pregnancy published in 1999 argued that young mothers could best be supported in their parent's home[96] (SEU, 1999). Local councils were given the responsibility to keep pregnant teenagers or young mothers in the family home (DCSF, 2007). While policy certainly favours young mothers living in the parental

[95] Adequacy implies the home should be in a neighborhood not characterised by anti-social behaviour and violence, should have no disrepair issues, and should have adequate facilities such as elevators.

[96] As explored in Chapter Two, the SEU and the TPS focused on teenage mothers under the age of 20 rather than young mothers up to 25 as this thesis does.

home, research looking at the attitudes of young mothers found more mixed responses. Some mothers identify the importance of financial support and parenting guidance they receive from their own parents (particularly their mothers) at home (Cordes et al. 2009), while others associated their own home with independence (Cooke and Owen, 2006). The mothers in my research reported both positive outcomes such as greater financial stability and negative ones such as perceived interference of their parenting abilities. Six of my participants aged between 16 and 21 were currently living with other relatives when I interviewed them.[97] All of these mothers had given birth under the age of 20.

Ava who was 16 and had given birth only 6 weeks before I interviewed her, currently lived at home with her mum. She told me that while they mostly had a good relationship, she disliked her mother's constant intervention in the day to day care of her daughter. Ava was claiming income support (IS) meaning she had a very limited income. However, even if she did have access to additional resources – entering into a rental contract would be not be possible due to her being under 18. As Ava did not want to live in temporary accommodation, living at her mother's home was her only option. As she explained:

> *'I get on really well with my mum now but she can be quite controlling. Saying things like 'I can't believe you would do that to your baby!' But it's like – she's not your baby, she's my baby. But obviously there isn't any other option.'*

Furthermore, Ava's involvement with social workers as discussed in the previous chapter meant, from her point of view, that she had little choice in the matter. She felt being at home was a good way of satisfying her social worker that she had the support of her mother in everyday tasks. This 'protected' her child.

[97] Apart from Cali, the mothers were living with one or both of their parents. Cali lived with her aunt and uncle.

Other mothers living at home with their parents reported an unwelcome interference with their parenting responsibilities. Maria, 21, who had a two year old and lived with her mother and 2 younger siblings also reported feeling undermined. She had fallen out with her mum and had sofa surfed and sometimes even slept on the street throughout most of her pregnancy. She returned home after her child was born but tensions remained and she felt desperate to find her own place:

> *'I ended up in hospital because I wasn't living well so they [her parents] took me back in because I didn't think like it would have been me or the baby pulling through. We really weren't living well and so they took me back in and they've now got control over my parenting. So getting my own place is a big must. They can help me by writing a letter and that but they're refusing to do it. So it is really difficult for me.'*

In addition to caring for her own daughter, Maria also took responsibility of the day-to-day care of her two younger siblings. As her mother worked full time she was responsible for many of the household and childcare tasks. She described to me what a typical day was like:

> *'I'll go and do the food shop, I then go home and put her down [daughter] for a nap and then I gotta tidy up. Cause my mum's working – I'm running the household. So then I'll tidy up, by the time I've tidied up – my brother and sister will be in from school and then I gotta put the tea on. And then I gotta give her [daughter] a bath and then put her to bed and then I gotta tidy up again.'*

Mia, 19, who lived with her partner in her parent's home also reported that her mother interfered with her parenting. While the support was mostly appreciated, she sometimes found the interference overbearing and this caused tension within the home:

> *'So she [her daughter] doesn't sleep very well so it's not just us that gets tired, it's everyone. So I know they will take a fall from that as well but then at the*

same time I know mum doesn't mean it but she will say things sometimes and I'm like 'no it's alright she's my baby, I can do it.'

Mothers living at home also reported it being overcrowded with the lack of space causing tension among everyone living there. Madison described her current living situation:

'Myself and son, and yeah my mum and stepdad. My older sister and her partner, my younger sister, my younger brother and my other younger brother who's only one.'

Madison's current three bedroomed home was very small and I could imagine how crowded it must have been with everyone there. Similar to Maria, Madison was also involved in the care of her younger siblings. Research has found young mothers are often involved with other caring responsibilities to both their parents and younger siblings even before becoming a mother themselves (Rolfe, 2008). This type of collective bargaining between mothers and parents means while they retain a place to live, they are expected to continue with their household duties including additional childcare.

While overcrowding, care for young siblings and perceived interference from parents was certainly problematic for the young mothers, they also noted the increased financial security they gained by living at home. Only Maria had to pay a contribution (£50 a week) to her mother and she still felt this was considerably cheaper than if she lived alone with her daughter. Indeed, those living at home with family all stated they had enough money to support themselves and their child. As Madison explained:

'I think at the moment cause I'm living at home – yeah. And that's because it's quite easy but I think once I have my own place it would be really tight and I'd be ready to work straight away. Cause I don't go out like on nights out or anything. The only type of going out I do is to like zoos and things like that

which isn't exactly much money. But it still seems to go so with bills as well I can't see it stretching far.'

This type of financial security was in contrast to most of the other mothers, living either in permanent accommodation or in temporary accommodation. Despite acknowledging they may lose financial security; all mothers were still keen to move out and gain their own independence. However, the route to permanent accommodation for these mothers will likely be difficult. Affordability in the housing market may prove harder for lone mothers as their child-rearing responsibilities often prevent them from accessing secure employment (Rabindrakumar, 2015). Furthermore, as young people they are less likely to have established themselves within the housing market before becoming pregnant. Not having access to financial resources increases the likelihood of being dependent on the state to meet housing needs. Indeed, some of my participants were currently in temporary accommodation, funded by the state. Their stories will now be explored.

6.2.2 Living in Temporary Accommodation

Five of the mothers who took part in individual interviews were currently considered statutory homeless[98] and were living in temporary accommodation. This accommodation was either a self-contained flat or a room in a shared house with other young mums[99]. All of the accommodation was provided only to young mothers aged between 18 and 25. Mothers were provided with additional support as part of this accommodation including visits from a dedicated support worker.[100] An additional eight mothers who took part in individual interviews also reported being homeless either during their pregnancy or after giving birth[101].

[98] This is where a duty to house has been accepted by a Local Council in England.
[99] Young fathers (including partners) were not allowed to live in the accommodation and as its was solely for young women and their children.
[100] The support element of the housing will be discussed in Chapter Seven.
[101] Maria spent most of her pregnancy sofa surfing and Carla spent some of her pregnancy living in a tent. The other mothers were placed in a hostel or mother and baby accommodation.

Having the right housing support is essential for young mothers who are at risk of homelessness. Research by the housing charity St Mungos found that 79 per cent of homeless women reported that their children had been taken into care[102] (Hutchingson et al. 2015). Furthermore, in recent years there have been reports of local councils threating to start care proceedings when families present themselves as homeless (Hilditch, 2018). Despite the recent threats by these local councils, the Housing Act (1996) gives priority to pregnant women and families with children meaning local councils are responsible for providing them with accommodation. However, this accommodation can take various forms including bed and breakfast, hostel, or temporary accommodation such as in mother and baby accommodation.

Mothers had mixed feelings about the temporary accommodation. Those living in self-contained flats reported more positive experiences than those in a shared accommodation with the latter reporting difficulties sharing a kitchen and bathroom. All mothers appreciated they had been given somewhere to live and felt this was an important step towards moving into their own permanent home. My participants reported a number of reasons why they were living in temporary accommodation including not being able to live with their family, having previously been in the care of social services, relationship breakdowns, and homelessness.

Enid, 17, who had a 3-year-old son had spent some of her childhood in care but had returned home to live with her mother when she found out she was pregnant at 14. Shortly after turning 16 she moved into a shared house with other young mums provided by a joint project made up of a housing association and a charity supporting young mums. At first Enid was allocated a room in a shared house. She found her new accommodation stressful:

> *'When I first moved here I wasn't quite sure cause obviously like it's all girls. Like girls can be like a bit bitchy. And I didn't get on with a few girls here so when I did move it was like a bit awkward.'*

[102] Before or after becoming homeless.

'Sharing a kitchen and trying to cook food and having little children running around is quite hard. Then you gotta take them upstairs with the food, it's just hard work.'

After being in the shared house for a year, Enid was able to move into a self-contained flat and she reported this accommodation was much better for her. Her own flat meant she could gain greater independence and have her own space but also still benefit from the support attached to her accommodation. Enid also reported an improved relationship with other young women who lived in the same building as her.

Zoe had previously lived in private rented accommodation with her former partner. However, once the relationship broke down Zoe found herself homeless and moved into a shared house with other young mothers. Zoe, now 25, was in a very small room with her son, aged 18 months, with barely enough room for her bed and his cot. The room was also very hot and Zoe also had some problems with other residents:

'We've had new residents and it's just not a nice place to live at the minute. They're pregnant so it's like they don't understand. They leave stair gates open and they're banging around. The other day it was like ten past 6, then 2 in the morning then 11 at night. When obviously he's asleep and it wakes him up. It's just getting aggravating. I'm dying for my own place.'

Riley, 21, had one child aged 2 and lived in a shared house with other young mothers. Similar to Enid and Zoe, she struggled with sharing kitchen and bathroom facilities:

'I'm a bit of a funny person with sharing and obviously especially when it's a bathroom or a kitchen cause of other people's germs. I get anxiety. It doesn't help with the condition of the house either. So no I'm not happy living here – I want out as fast as I can.'

She also reported issues with the current neighbourhood, particularly living close to lots of public houses:

'That's open till late. So they're all rowdy and loud and yelling and there's some bad stuff that happens and the shops aren't exactly close by.'

Due to the cost of public transport Riley often had to walk miles to access a large grocery store. Having long-term health conditions made this even more difficult for her. She had been living in her current accommodation for about 8 months after her relationship with her mother broke down and she had to leave the family home. Riley was three months pregnant and was desperate to move into permanent social housing as soon as possible.

One young mother whom I interviewed, Bella aged 20, lived with her partner and eight-month-old daughter in accommodation they rented from a private landlord. Despite Bella's partner working, their household income was very low and they had restricted options when looking for somewhere to live. Bella explained some of the issues with their home:

'It's a studio flat so it's only one room so it's really little. My baby has already started rolling and she wants to move everywhere but we can only let her on our bed as there's no space. We can only fit a really small fridge and we can't really refrigerate stuff and it [food] gets damaged.'

Bella, her partner and daughter were all living in very cramped space where the bedroom was also the living room – with a small section in the corner that acted as a kitchen. The only separate room was a small bathroom. Bella did not believe they would be able to afford accommodation suitable for their needs anytime soon and had therefore applied to the local council waiting list for social housing. This type of accommodation is advantageous for low-income groups because the local housing allowance[103] does not always cover the full cost of properties in the private rented sector (Kemp, 2008). However, Bella had been informed that because she was not homeless and her accommodation was considered suitable, she should expect about

[103] Rate of housing benefit paid for private tenancies.

a 5-year wait for social housing. This is not unusual with the around 27 per cent of households waiting more than five years (Shelter, 2018b).

Similar to Bella, other mothers living in temporary accommodation were keen to access social housing. However, unlike Bella, other mothers in temporary accommodation are given higher priority because they are considered to be homeless[104] (Shelter, 2019a). In addition to being cheaper, social housing is advantageous because it offers more security with longer-term tenancies (Wilson, 2018)[105]. However, the Localism Act (2011) brought in stricter regulations for those in temporary accommodation and they can now be offered private tenancies that last for at least 12 months rather than being allowed to wait for a social rented home. If the family refuses the offer of private accommodation, the council can discharge its duty and the family risks being made homeless (Shelter, 2018d). This change in policy has further limited the options for low-income families such as young lone mothers. This governance around homelessness and social housing means mothers face a difficult decision; either they agree to somewhere that is unsuitable for their needs or they risk the council removing their duty to house them, possibly leaving them homeless. Despite this, my participants remained positive that they would be allocated their own permanent social home and this would be the end of their journey through the housing system. However, the stories of mothers in permanent homes (almost all of whom had previously been in temporary accommodation) would suggest the journey doesn't end at this stage. Their stories will now be explored.

6.2.3 Living in Permanent Social Rented Accommodation

Apart from Bella, all of the mothers I interviewed who had their own place lived in social housing, rented to them either by the local council or a housing association. This is not unusual amongst lone parent families with almost a quarter of social

[104] They are considered to be homeless because they are living in temporary accommodation. Those living in temporary accommodation are given higher priority when social housing is allocated.

housing being allocated to them (MHCLG, 2018a). Almost all of the mothers I interviewed had been homeless previously and spent time in temporary accommodation prior to accessing a social home. Their journey to social housing had often involved a waiting period of at least 6 months (and up to 2 years) and inevitably mothers had to make compromises about where they would live and the type of accommodation they accepted.

Research suggests social housing is characterised by a number of problems. The most recent data published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018b) found that overcrowding was more common in social housing than private rented or owner-occupier homes. Disrepair issues including damp and broken features such as windows are often cited tenants as 'social housing problems' (Pevalin et al. 2008; Boomsma et al. 2017). In addition to problems within the accommodation, social housing is more likely to be found in areas of concentrated deprivation (Crook et al. 2016). Mothers in my research reported experiences of anti-social behavior including violence, drug use and damage to their property. Mothers also raised disrepair concerns particularly around cold, damp and mold, and two mothers also reported overcrowding. Almost all of the mothers I interviewed were dissatisfied with their allocated social home and spoke of their desire to move to different social housing.

Robyn had been in temporary accommodation for all of her pregnancy. Spending most of her childhood in care, she had moved into temporary accommodation at 17 that had given her some independence. However, she had been forced by her local council to move into a mother and baby accommodation shortly after becoming pregnant. Robyn explained:

> *'I had to leave there [her temporary accommodation] because [Local Council] made me move into a mother and baby unit and the rent was £250 a week and I couldn't afford it. I asked if I could stay another 3 months 'cause I was already*

bidding[106] on properties. But the lady was very determined that I had to move out there and then. It would have been a lot better if I could have just stayed there and work as I wouldn't have been stuck on any benefits at all.'

It was not clear why this decision had been taken but it had caused Robyn considerable difficulties as she had been forced to move from somewhere she called home and also give up her job (because it was a considerable distance from the mother and baby temporary accommodation). She felt the actions of the council had taken away her independence and her choice to live where she wanted. Robyn was able to find a permanent social flat shortly after her daughter was born and I noted myself when arriving at her home that it was newly decorated and comfortable. However, during our interview she informed me of the problems with the property:

'I struggle with living here. It's like the worse place. There's a lot of anti social behaviour, there was a fire in the communal area last week and just things like that and having stuff chucked at my windows. And when I moved in here I was told I wasn't allowed a washing machine and that I had to use the communal launderette but it's just absolutely foul in there. And I have to go in there and I have to like clean it before I use it. It's just like full of dog hair, it's just horrible.'

Robyn was particularly dissatisfied with the laundry facilities and was currently in the process of appealing to be re-housed. During my visit Robyn showed me some newly washed clothes to demonstrate her point. They were indeed covered in hair and a smell was also apparent.

Carla had spent most of her childhood in care and was in a violent relationship when she fell pregnant with her first child at 17. Homeless at the time and living in a tent, Carla was unable to access a mother and baby unit as her partner was very controlling and she feared violent repercussions from him if she did so. Carla was currently living

[106] Bidding refers to the process where those on the local social housing list register their interest with certain properties. If they are high enough on the list of bidders, they may be offered that home.

with her new partner, 2 of her own children and a stepchild. However, the flat was in general disrepair and with 3 children (aged between 6 weeks and 13 years) and only 2 bedrooms, was very overcrowded. Indeed, items owned by the family such as clothes and toys were overflowing out of the cupboards and Carla explained she had taken to just piling everything up. She also talked about other problems with the property:

> *'It's horrible here, very hard. The neighbours, it constantly skinks of cannabis, constantly. Like I'll go in the bathroom and it smells like someone's literally sat there on top of me smoking it. There's other people smoking it and it comes up through the fans. And they're just very rude. And obviously I've got no lift in here so I've got to bump a double pram up and down the stairs everyday.'*

> *'It's like repairs in here with my window. The wind blew it open, snapped the safety lock and the window actually snapped on the outside, the plastic is snapped and I've been waiting for that to be fixed since December.'*

Carla showed me the broken window in her living room. She pushed her hand against it and without the safety latch – it opened up wide easily. She and her partner had taken to putting things in front of it including boxes to stop her two-year-old daughter from climbing up and falling out. With their flat on the fourth floor, a fall would likely be fatal and Carla despaired at waiting 3 months without a resolution. Currently on the waiting list for a new social home, they had been informed the waiting time was around 4 years, despite the numerous problems.

Kylie, 25, who had a 21-month-old son, talked about her dissatisfaction with the area she lived in:

> *'It's outside that I don't like. It's just too much that goes on. I don't like the thought of bringing my son up around here either because just yesterday the co-op round the corner, there was armed robbery with a gun and a knife, two guys went in there, there was a police chaser that went up the road just off of mine and smashed into a car! There was a girl that lived downstairs in my*

block, she got stabbed over in the lane just before I moved in here. And then a month or two ago the guy downstairs he got stabbed by some 14, 15 year old kids like just outside the block.'

There were also issues with access to Kylie's flat. When I arrived at her home, the communal door wouldn't open and she had to climb down the stairs from her third floor flat with her child to let me in. Kylie had no access to a lift and had to manage the stairs with her child, the pram and often the shopping. She showed me a bump her son had sustained on his head as she had attempted to maneuver her pram up the stairs with him in it. Prior to moving into her flat she had spent time in a hostel while she was pregnant, she told me about her experience:

'It was literally like the worse place, like proper the worse people you could be living with. Cause they had like, they all had drug addictions, really harsh drug addictions like heroin, some people were smoking crack in their bedrooms. They just didn't care, they would smoke throughout the hallways, everywhere.'

Kylie reported being very frightened living in the hostel and often found herself giving other residents money after they would knock on her door at night waking her up. She had found someone unconscious in the shared bathroom due to an overdose and regularly witnessed intimidation and violence. The limited research available looking at the use of hostels by young pregnant women has highlighted the negative experiences they encounter such as drug use and violence from other residents (Cooke and Owen, 2006). Furthermore, as hostels have a mix of service users there is unlikely to be targeted support for young mothers, meaning their needs might not be addressed. Despite being arguably unsuitable, hostels are often considered appropriate temporary accommodation by local councils up until the seventh month of pregnancy (Cirone and Casey, 2017). However, Kylie did not move into a mother and baby accommodation until two weeks before her child was born and Enid and Poppy both had their belongings moved from the hostel into the mother and baby accommodation while they were in hospital giving birth. It appears therefore that

hostels continue to be used right up until the child is born leaving mothers in unsuitable accommodation throughout their pregnancy.[107]

Several of the mothers I interviewed lived in flats on third, fourth and even higher floors. I was surprised at how many didn't have access to a lift, either because there wasn't one or, as I was informed, it was often out of service. Ivy, 21 who had 2 children and was currently seven months pregnant was living in a block of flats without a lift. She was forced to climb three flights of stairs to her home often having to go up and down with her children to get up the pram and shopping:

> *'Hard. Very hard. Cause I live in top floor. It ain't like high rise, it's only got four floors. But I find my 2-year-old, he's steady on his feet but cause our steps are not normal steps they're kind of massive flipping steps. He finds it hard to like get his leg up walking up 3 flights of stairs so I find that he still wants to be carried up and down the stairs. There's no lift. And I've had like letters through the door cause we're not meant to leave our prams downstairs we have to take them with us up the stairs.'*

Ivy was experiencing overcrowding and with a four-year-old, a two-year-old and a baby on the way, was trying to reorganise her 2 bedroomed flat:

> *'So I've had to move the kids from their bedroom or what was their bedroom into what was the front room. So obviously they've got the big room cause even if I move them into my room, it's the exact same size, it's not gonna work. So I've moved them into there and I've put the front room into what was their bedroom and I keep getting told by the social and the council they're not meant to be in there, it's health and safety – but what are you gonna do?'*

[107] Issues of reduction in housing provision for young mothers will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

While there was little space for Ivy and her soon to be 3 children in her flat, she would not be defined as being overcrowded in policy terms. Homes with 2 bedrooms are not considered to be overcrowded until 3 residents live there. However, children under 1 do not count at all and children up to 10 are only counted as half a person (Shelter, 2019b). Thus, even after her third child is born, Ivy will only technically have 2 people living in the property.

As the responses by participants suggest, dissatisfaction with their current housing will lead to them to look for another home. Research indicates that residential mobility is common amongst young mothers with their children often living in a number of homes before they are ten years old (Pevalin, 2003). Research has shown moving from house to house can have a number of consequences for children. Digby and Fu (2017) found changing housing circumstances caused a number of issues for children including a feeling of displacement, poor mental health and withdrawal from their peers. Brown et al. (2012) found that even when controlling for socio-economic circumstances, poor mental health in adolescence and adulthood was associated with increased residential mobility in childhood. Thus, precarious housing situations could impact on their children who will also have to move from place to place in search of a permanent, adequate home.

In addition to housing, young mothers' experiences with money particularly around budgeting and concerns of being moved onto universal credit were very topical within the interviews. These will now be explored.

6.3 Managing on a Low Income: A Young Lone Mother's Approach

This section will consider the financial circumstances of the mothers in this research. All of the young mothers involved in this research reported that they were on a low income. Out of the 29 participants in this research, 23 were not in employment and were in receipt of a working-age benefit. Of these 23, one was claiming Employment and Support Allowance, three were in receipt of Universal Credit and nineteen were claiming Income Support.

As a group, women are more likely to experience poverty than men and lone mothers are more likely to experience poverty that single childless women (Collingwood, 2018). Lone mothers are much more likely to experience poverty than families with two parents (Rabindrakumar, 2018), and lone mothers are likely to be poorer than lone fathers (CPAG, 2010). Finally, as young women, they are likely to experience deprivation pre-pregnancy (Skinner and Marino, 2016). The impact of their gender, lone parenthood, youth and class means this group of women and their children lead financially insecure lives. The current climate characterised by reductions in benefit payments and greater conditionality have further exasperated the financial insecurity of this group of women (Rabindrakumar, 2017).

Most of the mothers in my research were currently in receipt of income support (IS). They received their IS on the same day fortnightly and their tax credit and child benefit weekly. Most reported this helped them with budgeting. Mothers tended to plan what they would spend their money on and 'stocked up' on items such as nappies, wet wipes and tinned baby food on the weeks they received their IS.
Three themes consistently emerged with mothers when talking about payments and managing money: i) careful budgeting practices, ii) financial hardships, and iii) concerns about the new universal credit (UC) system.

Zara, 20, had just moved into her first home after living in temporary accommodation for 18 months with her two-year-old child. She had completed a course aimed at teaching her how to budget and had found this very helpful. Buying her nappies and baby wipes in bulk when her IS was paid was her main approach while paying for her gas and electricity weekly [using prepayment meters] also helped. She also explained to me how she was managing her food budget:

> *'Food I do it as I need it, obviously I just stocked up today so it should last me about two weeks. And I make sure I've got enough money in that two weeks to get more.'*

She also told me the benefits system often confused her and when asked about whether housing benefit was paid to her landlord she said she *'thought so.'* When asked about how the new UC system would impact on her, she explained:

> *'For some people I guess it could be alright but for me, for a person who don't know how to budget money quite well, it would be difficult.'*

Carla and her partner also budgeted their money on a weekly basis. As they received her partner's wages and their tax credits weekly and her wages on a fortnightly basis, they found it much easier to budget and always prioritised certain items:

> *'We budget it weekly, we look at what we've got. Food, electric bill and the rent before anything. Then buy nappies. It's easier to go without nappies but food obviously feeding your children, like baby milk, that comes before anything, before I would pay the rent or electric. My electric comes next otherwise I wouldn't be able to cook – then the rent.'*

While they were limited when it came to paying for toys and days out for their children, Carla acknowledged they did usually have the money for food and to pay the bills, because they both worked. However, she also argued that the ability to budget well was because of their weekly incomes. She made her feelings about UC clear:

> *'I find it easier to manage my money weekly than what I would monthly. Cause obviously I shop weekly. Every time I've tried to do monthly, it just goes. How the hell do they expect people to live like that?'*

Riley, 21, was currently pregnant and living in temporary accommodation with her 2-year-old son. She was in receipt of IS as she was living alone but also had a partner who worked and lived separately. Despite him giving Riley some money, she still descried her financial situation as *'on a minimum basis'*. She stocked up on items during what she called her *'big week', i.e.* the alternate week she received her IS. She

liked knowing there would be some money coming in the following week in case she needed it and was concerned that UC would interfere with the way she budgeted:

> *'Lets say on my big week I'll go out and I'll do a really big shop. Fill up all I can in the fridge and the freezer and well as much as I can in the shared fridge. And do like snacks and drinks, nappies, wet wipes, whatever I need. And then if I don't need anything the next week I won't sort of use it. But sometimes I'm literally weekly doing stuff. It would be better for me to stay as I am now. Because obviously my bills come out once a month and all I gotta do is save up what I need. But you know if then if… I don't have to do the worry if let's say at the beginning of the month I pay my bills and everything, then shop whatever, do what I need but then something important comes up – then what am I supposed to do? It gives me a peace of mind having it weekly.'*

Robyn had concerns about paying her rent if she was transferred to UC. Despite having previous experience of budgeting on a monthly basis because she used to be in paid employment, her approach had changed since moving onto IS and having a child. Robyn echoed the concerns of other lone mothers regarding their rent being paid directly to them:

> *'I think they are actually on about them paying me the rent to pay to the Landlord. And to be honest I'm not the most organised with things like that. I'd just be terrible. I like the fact that housing benefit is paid straight to the Landlord. I don't know why they'd even suggest otherwise – it's just I know they're trying to reduce the staff and I know what the goal is but it's gonna get people into more debt. I don't really understand about banking and things like that.'*

Poppy currently lived in temporary accommodation. She had previously worked until her son was 8 months old and gave up her job when she moved into her current accommodation. She explained that even when she was working and being paid monthly, she still received her tax credits weekly. Having this weekly money allowed

her to meet unexpected costs and she was also concerned about budgeting one payment:

> *'It does cause me concerns because well…. I don't know cause when I was working I was getting paid monthly but obviously I was having his money [child related benefits for her son] as well weekly so if he needed something I could just go out and get it. But by being paid monthly, once it's spent and he needs something I haven't got, I can't go out and get it.'*

Ivy was due to give birth to her third child in three months and was aware she would not receive any additional tax credits[108]. She had been budgeting carefully to enable her to buy her new child items while also trying to balance the needs of her other two children. Ivy liked knowing even if she spent all of her IS in one go, she would have some tax credits the following week:

> *'It's gonna make me broke. Cause obviously you only get paid that once a month, don't you? So literally normally I get paid on a Tuesday, by Friday I'm broke. But I'm thinking it's only 3 days till my next pay day. So it's fine. But obviously getting paid monthly you're gonna have to plan ahead.'*

These comments from mothers currently claiming IS suggest the change to being paid monthly and the concern around managing the rent will be problematic for them. My participants found it much easier to budget on a weekly basis when they received their benefits. Research suggests low-income families find it easier to budget when they receive smaller amounts of money over time as opposed to a lump sum (Harris et al. 2009). In relation to UC, Tucker and Norris (2018) found the monthly payment cycles were causing budging difficulties for families. Research has also found rent arrears amongst UC claimants are much higher than those claiming Housing Benefit

[108] This was part of the Welfare Reform and Work Act (2016) that set a two-child limit for tax credits (and the UC equivalent). This is relevant for all children born after April 6th 2017 with some exceptions such as a child born through non-consensual conception (HM Revenue and Customs, 2017).

(National Housing Federation, 2018). This suggests families are struggling to manage with the monthly payments they need to make directly. It should also be noted there are additional problems with UC that will also impact on this group of women. The first is regarding the lower individual element (IS equivalent). Currently lone mothers receive a higher rate of IS once they turn 18, however under UC rules, they need to wait until they are 25 (Hampson, 2018). This is currently a difference of £66.05 a month (HM Government, 2019c). It should also be noted that similar to other working age benefits, the rate of UC is frozen until 2020. According to Barnard (2019), by April 2020 the freeze on benefits will move an additional 400,000 people into poverty. The freeze coupled with the lower rate paid to mothers based on their age is likely to have devastating consequences for my participants who are already struggling.

Research suggests there are a number of problems with claiming UC including difficulties establishing a claim, delays to payments, and administrative errors that result in claim cancellations (CPAG, 2018b). Two of my participants, Grace and Emma, reported problems when claiming UC. After applying for UC, Grace, 22, had struggled to get an appointment with the Job Centre and had to rely on food banks while she was waiting. It took almost 8 months to get the situation resolved:

> *'I couldn't buy him [son] anything because I had no money, I was going in every week to find out when this appointment was, and it was back in November 2016 when I wasn't even claiming to the point where in July they actually wrote to me apologising that they had made a mistake and they would refund me all the money that they should've paid me but that still doesn't make up for the like five months of your life hell. If I lived on my own and I had a child I wouldn't have been able to afford to look after my child.'*

Grace was, however, still having problems. She was getting the individual element[109] but still struggling to get the child element[110] for her 2-month-old son who had been added to her claim. Fortunately, Grace's situation was unusual as unlike other mothers in temporary accommodation, the place she lived received daily food donations from local businesses. This meant Grace was able to access food and could keep the individual element of UC she received for clothes and nappies for her son.

Unlike Grace, Emma has a partner but with them both being out of work, they had applied for UC. Emma explained there has been some confusion over their appointment at the Job Centre that lead to their claim being closed before they received a payment:

> *'They point blank refused to admit that they were wrong, so they messed up my partner's times for an appointment. On the journal it said a Tuesday but it was supposed to be on a Monday but they closed our claim and said that it was our fault. So we were just about to get money, so we already waited six weeks and we were just about to get money, then they closed our claim, so we had to make a new one and had to wait another whole six weeks to get money, so for twelve weeks we were without money with a new born baby, and they just didn't care.'*

The impact of this meant Emma had to use a food bank and incurred rent areas. Luckily Emma's partner found a job shortly after and as he was paid fortnightly, they were finding it much easier to manage and had caught up with their rent.
Most of my participants reported forgoing certain items such as internet access, personal leisure activities and taking their children to social events and activities (unless they were free). According to Walker and Chase (2015), low-income families

[109] This is part of UC that is paid to cover the individual living costs of the claimant. It is replacing Income Support, (Income-related) Job Seekers Allowance and (Income-related) Employment and Support Allowance.
[110] This covers costs associated with having children. This is capped at two children for those born after April 2017.

often struggle to engage in social events leading them to retreat from environments that require them to spend money. Some mothers in my research even reported having to miss utility payments to buy food items[111] and therefore had to choose between eating or topping up their electric/gas pre-payment key. Despite mothers' best efforts, unless they were living at home with other relatives, most reported they had to go without items they needed such as food and essential clothing. Mothers cited their low income as being the cause of this, coupled with them always wanting to meet the needs of their children first. Even when mothers had extra money such as from relatives on their birthday, they reported this was put towards bills or spent directly on their children.

Zara reported that she worried about money *'all the time.'* She bought nappies, wet wipes and formula milk for her son in bulk. While her son always had everything he needed, she never bought new clothes for herself and had gone one or two days without food on a number of occasions:

> *'There is few times where I've gone one, maybe two days without food, just to make sure I feed him but I would say I go without quite a lot of things.'*

Emma also explained both herself and her partner buy the items their daughter needed first and only if there is money left over would they buy things for themselves. Struggling financially also had other implications for Emma as she had very sensitive skin that meant she could only use particular products for bathing. As these were more expensive, Emma reported she had no choice but to use cheaper products in the past leading to itching and painful skin. I asked her about her priorities:

> *'The rent and gas and electric, then [child's] stuff. We come last always. As long as the rent and the gas and electric is here so I can sterilise her bottles and she can keep warm, and everything is paid for. She has nappies, wipes and milk and her food, and if we haven't got enough money one week for ourselves*

[111] Debt will be explored in Chapter Seven.

it doesn't matter, as long as she has got the things that she needs then everything is fine.'

As explored previously Ivy was currently seven months pregnant and was now struggling to fit into her clothes. She had recently bought some trousers that were on offer but had an alternative plan if she hadn't been able to find anything cheap:

'I don't ever buy myself anything. I've only just like bought myself two pairs of joggers 2 days ago cause I couldn't do up my jeans. So I was like….and that was only because they were 2 for 14 quid that I done that. Otherwise I would have just put a hair band on the button and just wrap it round.'

Being reliant on social security benefits causes financial hardships within households and often involves making difficult decisions about which items and services to prioritise (Patrick, 2017). Managing on a low income was clearly challenging for most of women in my research. With limited financial resources, young mothers regularly worried about money and reported prioritising items for their children when budgeting. Similar to other women, young mothers put their children's needs first regularly becoming the 'shock absorbers' (Lister, 2005:5) in their family budgets. They go without food, essential clothing and social activities to protect their children from poverty. Research from the Young Women's Trust (2017b) found that 46 per cent of mothers under 25 regularly miss out on meals to ensure their children don't have to, suggesting this is a common phenomenon amongst this group of women. Having a partner in work did make some difference for the mothers, although, apart from Mia[112], mothers still reported financial restrictions and only be able to afford the essentials.

With limited financial resources young mothers may benefit from employment and educational opportunities, both of which could lead to greater financial security. Education and paid employment will be the focus for the final section in this chapter.

[112] Who lived in her parent's house with her partner and daughter.

6.4 A Route Paved with Barriers to Greater Security: Opportunities for Education and Labour Market Participation

The final section will focus on attitudes towards education and paid work and the experiences of mothers currently engaged in these and those who were aiming to be so. As most mothers who were not engaged in education or paid work were considering taking up one or both of these at the time of interview, providing an analysis of these experiences together enables a better understanding of their lives. Within the interviews the same barriers: access to childcare, current housing status and lack of qualifications were reported by mothers considering education or paid work.

Education is an important dimension for young people with 44 per cent of 18 – 24 years old undertaking full and part time study or training (DBIS, 2014). As young people, I felt it necessary to explore my participants' current and future goals around education. Mothers and lone mothers in particular face additional barriers accessing education. Childcare can be problematic both due to funding and the shortage of childcare places (see Chapter Three). Indeed, mothers keen on pursuing education reported concerns about childcare and mothers already in education explained support for childcare was essential.

Evie was currently at university studying psychology. Her journey to university was much harder than other young people and Evie explained balancing care for her son and studying was hard work and she felt very different from her childless peers. After not getting her GCSEs in school, at 18 she enrolled in a college for young mothers. While there Evie passed her GCSEs as well as an access to higher education course. She told me her motivation for pursuing education:

> *'I think I was very immature before I had a child. I had to grow up. I didn't really have like you know any incentive. I didn't know what I was doing, I was just working in a supermarket and thought that was me – you know? I didn't think I was capable and didn't really think about life too much and then as*

soon as I had a child, when I realised I was pregnant, I was just like 'oh my God, I need to sort my life out.'

Evie was very happy with her current course although she felt that studying was hard while looking after a child alone. Without access to the internet at home she had to sometimes take her son up to university with her on weekends. However, Evie had no regrets with her decision to go to university and told me of her plans to apply for a masters in psychotherapy and eventually become a play therapist.

While now supported by higher education grants and loans, Evie had benefited from the Care to Learn Grant (CLG) as explored in Chapter Three. The CLG was an important component for other mothers currently engaged in or interested in pursuing education. Most of the mothers told me in our conversations about education that they had left school without any qualifications or had left education due to their pregnancy. However, many were keen to go back. Robyn left school without her GCSEs and enrolled on a college course to complete an apprenticeship in business support. She finished this and started work but as explored in section 6.2, she was had to leave after the council forced her to move from one temporary accommodation place to the next. Robyn was still ambitious and wanted to apply to university to study Business and HR. At 19 Robyn was aware she was only entitled to the CLG for one more year and had decided now was the time to pursue her education:

'I've got an assessment for [local college] next week to do my Maths and English. It's 3 days a week and that's the final year I'm eligible for the Care to Learn Grant so I can get that for a year. I want to go to University but I'm not very academic so I'm sort of having to work hard towards it.'

Ava left home at 14 and didn't finish school. Now 16 and living back at home with her mother she was keen to study art at university but knew she would need some qualifications before applying:

'I've applied to college in September but I don't have any GCSEs so a lot of the colleges say I should take an access course or take my GCSEs. But I don't know if they'll let me on to the access course because you're supposed to be 19.'

While all the details were not yet worked out, Ava was determined she was going to college as this was her route to university. Reflecting on her current housing situation, Ava also felt accessing loans and grants via higher education funding would enable her to move into her own home. Similar to Robyn, Ava planned to apply for the CLG and felt this was absolutely necessary for her to be able to go to college.
For mothers not entitled to the CLG[113], accessing education is much harder. Most mothers had reconciled to returning to college once their children started nursery. Kylie at 25 was too old to access the CLG grant and was waiting for her son to turn two so he could access his free 15 hours of childcare to enable her to go back to college. Although, Kylie was not sure the 15 hours would be enough, especially as the nursery by her home was two buses away from the college. Similar to most of the lone mothers I interviewed, Kylie left school without any qualifications:

'I want to go to college and study hairdressing. I did want to go and study forensics but I just don't think I could do it. Like I don't think I'm intelligent enough to do that line of work like cause you've got to have like really good qualifications. And in school I had quite a bad time so I didn't really do as well as I should have done. And then it would just be about retaking everything all over again and then by the time I'd finish I would probably be like, I don't know, I think it would take me at least ten years to do my maths and English from start again and then do my science and then go to study forensics at University.'

Interviews with mothers suggest that like other young people, they are committed to pursuing their education, and having access to the CLG is an invaluable source of

[113] As explored in Chapter Three, only those up to 19 years (at the start of their course) can access this grant. It is often paid up until then end of academic year during which the oldest mothers would have turned 20.

support for them. Research suggests access to the CLG has been instrumental in supporting mothers into education. Riley et al. (2010) found 77 per cent of young parents reported that they would have not been able to stay or return to education without the CLG. Furthermore, 75 per cent of the parents gained a qualification[114] as part of their course and this often led to pursuing higher learning. Interestingly, researchers found 80 per cent of those who benefited from CLG were lone mothers, suggesting the grant can improve the educational outcomes for young lone mothers in particular. Indeed, lone mothers under 25 tend to have fewer qualifications than lone mothers who give birth after age 25 (Tinsley, 2014).

Currently, mothers who are older than 19, have to apply to the Learner Support Scheme for help with child care costs. Help through this scheme however is dependent on the individual schemes offered by the colleges and can be given as grants or loans (HM Government, 2018b). As colleges can make their own decisions about funding priorities, unlike the Care to Learn Grant[115], access to childcare support is not a guarantee. I reviewed a number of procedures of further education colleges[116] in regards to support with childcare and they ranged from full support throughout the academic year, to limited support including not supporting those on part time courses, only paying for time in class,[117] and not paying costs for college related holidays.[118] Localised support at this level means young mothers face a 'postcode lottery' when it comes to applying for help (see Butler, 2000 for a discussion of this phenomenon). If they are not able to get enough support from the Learner Support scheme, they have to apply for a professional Career Development Loan to finance their studies. This will incur interest payments (National Careers

[114] Full or partial qualification.
[115] This is awarded on the basis of age alone.
[116] All colleges had rules on income and those on a low income and/or receiving certain benefits were always prioritised.
[117] Most nurseries are not paid by the hour but by session (either full or part day). This would have implications for students whose lessons started at 9.00 and finished early afternoon.
[118] The assumption from the colleges are presumably care is not needed if the mother is not in college. However, most childcare providers require payment for the full year (or until notice is given for the child to leave).

Service, 2016) and cause greater financial hardships for young mothers. While young mothers clearly value education, some of them, raised concerns about their academic capability. Low self-esteem is reported amongst young mothers pre-pregnancy (Emler, 2001). Furthermore, once they become mothers, young women report concerns about access to education because of learning difficulties, bullying and prior bad experiences at school (Dench et al. 2007). The background of these young mothers is clearly influential in their decision to engage in education and which course to do.

One of the practitioners I interviewed, Carol, worked supporting young mothers to go back to school or college and had a lot of experience of supporting them with CLG applications. Carol explained the grant did not always cover all of the childcare costs and even a small shortfall could mean the different between a mother doing a course or not. She gave an example of someone she was currently supporting:

> *'I've got a young woman who is starting a college course and she'll need to do a placement for a week but her child care – Care to Learn won't cover that so that's gonna be a barrier for her. So she's saying 'oh should I not do the course now.' But I'm saying 'no- do the course and we'll work around the childcare.' But if they're only allocated one hundred and sixty pound [a week] Care to Learn then how do they afford to make up the shortfall? And that's her aspiration – to do that course.'*

As young mothers tend to be poor and in receipt of benefits, it would not be possible for them to contribute towards the childcare cost themselves. Thus, having adequate coverage to allow these young women to take up course they want is very important and it is clear from Carol's comment there are some exceptions to coverage.

There are also implications for mothers waiting for their children to start school before returning to education. This is particularly problematic for lone mothers as without a partner, the rules attached to state benefits are dependent on their working requirements. Rules governing Income Support mean they need to claim Job

Seekers Allowance once their youngest child turns 5 and be available for work for 16 hours a week (Johnsen, 2014). The work related conditions attached to UC are even stricter. The work requirements for UC mean lone parents must be working for 16 hours a week once their youngest child turns 3, and 25 hours a week once their child turns 5[119] (DWP, 2019a). Thus, mothers waiting until their child goes to school will likely find themselves trying to balance paid work, college and child rearing responsibilities. The regulations attached to childcare support as well as benefits (both of which are related to the age of mother and their children) will impair my participants' decision-making and capacity to engage with education.

Mothers also reported similar barriers to work. A number of the mothers felt their lack of qualifications would prevent them from accessing secure work and as lone parents, felt childcare would be an issue. Maria raised concerns about not having her GCSEs and as a consequence, would be limited in what she could do for work. She believed the self-fulfilling prophecy would come to pass in her life:

> *'Skint in a flat with my kid. And probably some waste of space boyfriend and living off benefits, probably a kid on the way or something. I don't really like…. I don't know where you grew up but I see I grew up [area] is not a very nice area. And you don't really….you just don't expect much from people. So for me I don't really have that much faith in myself to expect more than what everyone else has got.'*

Some of my participants also reported their current housing status acted a barrier to access education or work. Poppy, for example, was keen to go back to work. However, her son was on a waiting list to access his 15 free hours of childcare a week and she felt the Job Centre were pressuring her to go to work:

> *'I don't think they [Job Centre Staff] understand 'cause I have told them my situation like over and over again but thy just don't seem to be like grasping on*

to it. If I had a partner it would be different cause I'd be able to go back to work and things like that but cause I'm a single parent I can't do it until he goes into nursery. If I had the choice I would go back to work but until he goes into nursery and I get a permanent place – I just can't. I'm stuck basically, it is hard.'

Poppy was also keen to study embalming at college and was planning on doing this while she worked. Poppy was aware that at 19 she would have to return to college in the coming September if she wanted to access the CLG. She was concerned however that her current housing situation might make it difficult for her to travel to the nursery and then to college. Being a lone parent clearly made it harder as without childcare she had to stay at home. Poppy also explained that living in temporary accommodation further complicated her situation as she did not want to take up a job only to be moved far away when she found a permanent social home.

Zoe, 25, who had an 18-month-old son, worked in healthcare before separating from her partner, becoming homeless and moving into temporary accommodation. She explained why she had chosen to stop working:

'I can't work at the minute cause when I came here the bloke who was like supporting us here, he basically turned round and said if I carried on working they would deduct housing benefit. So my mum said to him 'so you're basically saying it's better off for me to not work' and he said 'yeah.' So I had to ring my manager up at the time and just said I've gotta quit from today. I really didn't want to cause I've always worked, I love working, I love my job, I love having money. And that's it, I didn't go back. So whilst I'm here I can't physically work because I'm not better off.'

For Zoe, it was clear her working situation would not be resolved until she had found a place of her own. While she reported enjoying her job she thought she would be financially better off living on benefits while in temporary accommodation. She also

explained her former job had involved 10 hour shifts and she didn't have anyone to care for her son for this extended period of time.

Young mothers represent a group who are unlikely to be in paid employment (Ruggeri and Bird, 2014). Even when in paid work, lone mothers are likely to be confined to low-paid, insecure jobs (Millar and Ridge, 2017). Indeed, only four of the mothers in my research were in work and all of them reported it was low paid and part time (2 mothers did 2 part time jobs). In cases where their partner worked, they also reported low wages. Furthermore, they all identified issues regarding balancing paid work with family life and problems accessing childcare (much of which was informal). Mia and her partner both worked. While living at home with her parents they were saving as much as they could for a deposit for their own place to rent. Mia was currently working two jobs: providing facials in a salon and working in a chip shop. Both jobs made up the equivalent of full-time work (on the minimum wage based on her age). While she noted they needed the money, she found it difficult balancing childcare with work and felt mothers were often in a difficult position:

> *'Everyone's like if you are not in work you are on benefits and then apparently you're bad but if you're in work you are a bad mum because you left your baby and it's just like you can't win.'*

Mia is not alone in feeling this way. Research by Asher (2009) found women face difficult decisions when deciding whether or not to go back to work after having a child and working out how to balance mothering and working responsibilities. This is a gendered issue as Asher argues men do not face the same dilemma. Perceptions around motherhood and work are particularly relevant to both young and lone mothers. Their youth and marital status are both associated with the negative stigma of not working and claiming state benefits meaning their behaviour is subject to greater scrutiny (Churchill, 2007).

Despite living with her parents and 17-year-old sister (who would all help with the childcare), Mia often had to hire a child minder to care for her daughter. The other

mothers in my research tended to rely completely on informal childcare arrangements to allow them to work. Hailey, 25, who had a 1-year-old son, struggled to balance paid work and childcare. Her former partner had been helping out to allow her to do her 16-hour a week cleaning job. However, he had recently ceased doing this and she had become dependent on her mother. Unfortunately, her mother lived far away and Hailey had to leave at 5am to catch a bus and get back to her workplace that was close to her home. Similar to Carla, Hailey's hours were spread over the 5-day working week. Informal care arrangements are important for some lone mothers to enable them to maintain paid work (Millar and Ridge, 2009a; Brady, 2017). This was certainly true for my participants including Hailey whose anti-social working hours meant she could not access nursery care.

Even as their children grow up, childcare problems persist for lone mothers. Even though her son was now at school Lucy still found balancing childcare and her work difficult. She had two part time jobs working in a clothes shop and providing support to other young mothers. Lucy often found her schedule exhausting and sometimes had to sleep in her car at her workplace after taking her son to school before she started. She talked about being a lone parent and balancing work:

> *'I am going to have to drop him off and pick up and work around. I have got a very supportive family, but at the same time they've all got their own lives, so I am not going to be like can you do this, can you do this because they have to sacrifice something somewhere for that. No it is quite challenging, even now I think even just trying to fit work around school hours.'*

Balancing motherhood and work was challenging for mothers who were mostly dependent on informal care arrangements. Research suggests lone mothers depend on both formal and informal care arrangements to allow them to engage in the labour market (Skinner and Finch, 2006). Much of this informal care comes from their own parents or other family members (Bell et al. 2005). However, young mothers are less

likely to see their family as a network of social support[120] (Vary, 2001). Thus, the lower levels of social capital amongst this group make utilizing informal childcare arraignments more difficult

As explored in Chapter Three, pursuing higher education can increase potential earnings and open up greater employment opportunities. Poor educational outcomes usually linked with young motherhood reported in previous literature (see Imamura et al. 2007; Corlyon and Stock, 2013 for example) have also been found within this research. Despite this, it is clear from the responses my participants similar to other young people value education. However, young mothers, unlike other young people, face barriers around childcare when considering future study and work options.

6.5 Conclusion

Findings presented in this chapter suggest young mothers' lives are characterised by precarity. They face a number of challenges accessing housing, education and employment. Additionally, their income is restricted meaning they often have to make difficult decisions when budgeting. The findings also highlight the importance of the social statuses which young mothers hold. Their age, gender, social class and lone parenthood statuses intersected to create unique experiences and hardships for the women in this research.

Housing is an important dimension to the lives of young mothers; however, they face a number of barriers accessing adequate accommodation. Their age means young mothers are very unlikely to be established within the housing market. Indeed, many of the mothers in this research were still living in the family home when they found out they were pregnant; others were homeless and living in temporary accommodation, and others had sofa surfed or sleep rough during their pregnancy. While there is a small number of studies looking at young mothers' experiences of temporary accommodation (see Cooke and Owen, 2006) no study has focused on

[120] This is because mothers report high rates of conflict with other family members.

their complex housing journeys. This research has begun to address this gap in knowledge by exploring young mothers' housing outcomes during pregnancy and after the birth of their child. Even when mothers did eventually move into accommodation of their own, this was seldom the end of their journey. In addition to being disadvantaged because of the age, their status as lone parents also acted as a disadvantage in the housing market. Lone mothers, as a consequence of their low income, are more likely to need access to social housing than couples with children (MHCLG, 2018a). While lone motherhood and age are important in understanding the housing outcomes of young mothers, social class is as well. Mothers reported often having to compromise and accept permanent housing they didn't really want, because, for example, it was far away from their family. When citizens do not have access to financial resources they are usually dependent on the state to meet their housing needs. As a consequence of current policy and limited financial resources, mothers have very little control over their housing status both with regards to where they live and the type of accommodation they have.

In terms of money, mothers show great skill and care in budgeting and appreciate the consequences if they fail to do so. Having smaller amounts of money on a regular basis allows them to prioritise food and bills on a weekly basis, and the knowledge that other payments will arrive shortly gives them a sense of financial security. This approach to money management is common in low-income households with budgeting reported to be much easier with smaller, regular amount of money (Harris et al. 2009). Most participants in my research argued the monthly pay cycle of UC would cause problems for them.

Despite careful management, mothers found it difficult to meet all expenses and reported going without food, new clothes and leisure activities. Those living away from the family home found it much harder to pay out for everything they needed. For these mothers, the introduction of UC will further restrict their finances. Research suggests lone mothers will be worse off under UC compared to the former benefits system and worse off under UC than couples (Tucker, 2017). While lone fathers could be subject to the same reductions, these are unlikely to impact them in the same way

as lone mothers because lone fathers[121] tend to have greater financial security (CPAG, 2010). While young mothers will be impacted as lone mothers, their age will further disadvantage them due to them not being entitled to the higher rate of the individual element of UC until they are 25 (Gingerbread, 2013a).

Some of my participants who were not in paid work were currently pursuing or considering pursuing education opportunities. Similar to other young people, they are keen to pursue their goals. However, young mothers face additional barriers compared to their peers due to their social position. Having children during youth often interrupts women's education (Lall, 2007) meaning they have to pursue it while raising their child. The lack of childcare support after age 19 (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2018) coupled with employment conditionality attracted to both IS and UC means lone mothers are faced with a limited time frame to get their GCSEs or study for further education qualifications. Their limited income means they cannot finance their own education and are therefore dependent on policy to make decisions about if and when they can pursue their education. Current restrictions on childcare support while studying in addition to benefit conditionality which promotes a 'work first' approach at the expense of qualifications hinders the educational qualifications for these young women.

Mothers who were in employment reported being in low -paid work and used informal childcare arrangements. They also shared that balancing their lives with their children and work was often difficult.

These barriers to education and work mean young mothers are likely to remain on a low income and thus be more dependent on social security benefits and therefore have to deal with all the difficulties explored in this chapter. Their limited income means they will continue to have limited housing choices. This demonstrates how the dimensions of young mothers' lives: housing, money, education and employment are

[121] This is because lone fathers tend to have more qualifications and better paid employment.

all interrelated. As set out in Chapter Two, the use of intersectionality was selected for this research to challenge the way welfare services, particularly social security categorise citizens on single statuses. However, young lone mothers do not fit 'neatly' into any one category and instead the various statuses influence their access to various forms of provision including housing, education and social security benefits.

This chapter has shown how young mothers face a number of hardships around finances, housing conditions, and access to education and paid employment. To enable them to mitigate against some of these challenges, mothers drew on formal and informal support. This is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Seven

Coping with Young Lone Motherhood: Formal and Informal Networks of Support

7.1 Introduction

This final analysis chapter will build on the previous one by looking at how young mothers draw on (or not in some circumstances) support and intervention services. I will also explore the reduction in local services for mothers and the consequences for my participants.

Interviews with participants suggested that both informal and formal networks of support were utilised. For the purposes of this chapter informal support refers to financial and other support (social and emotional) given by family members (including voluntary support from the child's father) and friends. Formal support networks refer to those delivered officially by the state including education, housing, children centres and financial support as well as the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) which intervenes when separated parents cannot agree on financial support for their child. Other forms of formal support include food banks, baby banks and financial institutions such as banks.

The first section will explore how young mothers adapt to their limited financial circumstances by seeking (or not) financial support from the father of their child as well as their own family. The second part will focus on the role of more formal financial support services including local councils, the Social Fund, credit unions and charities such as food banks. For the final section I will consider the role of non-financial support services targeted at young mothers and how they have been changing in recent years. This section will also include a discussion concerning additional services mothers would like access to.

This final chapter will mainly draw on data from the individual interviews with young mothers. There will also be some insights from one of the focus groups as this discussed how much my participants valued the young mother group they attended. Furthermore, there will contributions from the four practitioners I interviewed as well as some observations taken from my journal while doing my fieldwork. As services delivered for young mothers are provided at the local level and there is limited literature regarding these, the practitioners provide context to service provision including the reduction and restructure of local provision for young mothers.

7.2. Present Mothers, Absent Fathers and Helpful Grandparents: Dynamics of Family Support

As explored in the previous chapter, the mothers in this research often found it difficult to get by on their limited incomes with many reporting they did not have enough to support themselves and their children. Some mothers had to go without items such as food and essential clothing to enable them to provide for their children. As income from benefits and paid employment was limited, money from the child's father could potentially help in meeting financial shortfalls. Research has shown that regular Child Maintenance payments can play a key role in boosting low-incomes (Bradshaw, 2006b; Hakovirta, 2011; Bryson et al. 2012). As explored in Chapter Three, recent policy changes in Child Maintenance provision has focused on encouraging separated parents to make their own private arrangements. However, this approach is unlikely to benefit the majority of lone mothers as there is often resistance from non-resident fathers to pay (Skinner, 2012). The other option for lone mothers is to use the Child Maintenance Service provided by the state. However, as explored in Chapter Three, using the CMS comes with an access charge and the possibility of deductions from any maintenance payments mothers receive. Furthermore, the state does not have a good record of facilitating maintenance arrangements. The amount of child maintenance debt that has built up while being managed by the previous maintenance service (the Child Support Agency) suggests it has failed to ensure money is passed from the non-resident to the resident parent (see DWP, 2017b; DWP, 2018c). In 2019 it was announced the Government was writing off £1.9 billion

in child maintenance debt owed to resident parents and their children that the CSA failed to collect (Jarrett, 2019).

I asked all of the lone parents within the individual interviews about child maintenance with 5 mothers currently getting some money and 15 not receiving anything. Mothers not getting any maintenance had made an active decision not to ask for it either because their former partner had either no contact with their child, had been violent towards them, or was in prison. For a small sample of the mothers, while they did not live with the father of their child, they had either an 'on/off' relationship or they were not able to live with them[122] and did not ask for maintenance in these cases.

Ava had a brief relationship with the father of her baby daughter. She told me about his response when she told him she was pregnant and her subsequent feelings about his involvement with her daughter:

> *'When I told him I was pregnant he told me he wished I didn't exist and told me I was a bitch. And throughout my pregnancy I thought I'm not gonna have anything to do with him, I don't want anything to do with him and I don't want her [daughter] to have anything to do with him.'*

Ava was not currently receiving child maintenance and when I asked her about applying, she responded:

> *'No, I'll never apply for it. Actually he's not on the birth certificate, he doesn't have parental rights. I don't want him to have parental rights.'*

I also asked her if she thought by asking for financial support that would increase his rights:

[122] This could be because of their age and therefore they were living with parents, because they were living in mother and baby temporary accommodation, or as in one case, the father of the child was at university.

'Well it would – wouldn't it? Cause then he'd officially be the parent. And like I don't want that to happen.'

Maria had also received a negative response from her former partner when she found out she was pregnant. He ended the relationship immediately and even though she was homeless, he refused to help and continued to ignore her when they saw each other on the street. Even though Maria believed gaining child maintenance would help her financially; this was not enough to convince her to apply:

'I'm doing all the work so I'd rather not have his money, I'd rather struggle. I don't want any of his money.'

I asked Maria what she thought the consequences of applying for child maintenance would be:

'So in my head I'm thinking I don't want your money because I don't want him saying that he wants to see her. And you know the courts can do a lot of things about that – can't they? So I don't want any involvement and if I'm not getting his money then the courts can't do nothing.'

Maria raised concerns of the relationship between child maintenance and access to her daughter. She argued that she would rather have less financially than apply for support, and risk the courts becoming involved and making decisions about contact. Lucy was also concerned about this. Describing her former partner as *'controlling'* the relationship had broken down while she was pregnant and she had not heard from him since her son was born over six years ago. Like other mothers in this research, Lucy had made an active decision not to claim:

'For me it was I think the sort of person he is I thought actually he would have a hold on me. He would have that, oh well I have done this and it would give him more rights, so it was more actually what's better for us [child and herself] rather than financially.'

When I asked if she thought it would improve her financial situation, Lucy believed that it would but this was not enough to convince her:

> *'I think it gives them [fathers] more rights. I think I felt actually, I would much rather have less money.'*

Survey data collected by Toomse and Maplethorpe (2010) suggests 63 per cent of lone mothers make the decision not to claim maintenance either because they had no contact with the father or because they did not want contact with the father. Other survey data collected by Flynn and Smith (2016) found that 24 per cent of lone mothers who had previously used the CSA as a way to claim maintenance, decided not to seek an alternative arrangement because they had no relationship or did not want a relationship with the non-resident parent. The discussions with my participants bring some context to the survey data. Their responses suggest they actively choose not to claim maintenance because of concerns about their former partner wanting contact with their child. This highlights the complexities of their fractured relationships and the implications this has in regards to asking for and receiving child maintenance.

Other mothers reported they did not claim child maintenance because the process was complicated, you had to pay to access it and they would receive little money anyway. Poppy explained that the £20 fee attached to making at application to the Child Maintenance Service put her off and she also explained:

> *'I could claim it but his dad don't work so I'd be going through all that effort for 2 pound a week which is not worth it. So I've just left it. Plus his dad's not on the birth certificate so it will be harder trying to claim it so I'm told. I've been doing it two years on my own so it's not going to make a difference really.'*

Furthermore, Poppy's former partner had a history of violence (towards her and other people). The experience of violence from a former partner was cited as the reason by 23 per cent of mothers who did not want to set up a child maintenance

arrangement (Patel et al. 2016a). Rabindrakumar and Allbeson (2017) have been highly critical of policy concerning child maintenance and domestic violence arguing that survivors of abuse are required to disclose personal details to their former partner to allow them to make payments. This leaves the mothers vulnerable to retribution and further abuse, and being denied maintenance out of fear.

Similar to other mothers, Poppy was also concerned about requesting maintenance as this would give her former partner the right to child contact. These responses suggest most mothers who were estranged from their child's father had concerns about the link between child maintenance and child contact[123]. Accepting the absent father's financial support would legitimise his parental status and make it easier for him to gain child contact. This is a common misconception amongst separated parents (Skinner and Bradshaw, 2000; Flynn and Smith, 2010). My participants' approach to child maintenance highlights gendered issues regarding money, a tool that has often been linked to male and paternal power in opposite-sex relationships (Vogler et al. 2008). Even when couples separate, gendered power over money and family budgets influences fathers' attitudes towards financial support. Research by Natalier and Hewitt (2014) found fathers paying maintenance wanted control over how the money was spent and questioned the legitimacy of their former partner's practices in terms of what they used the maintenance for. In my research, mothers associated parental power with financial support and argued that accepting money from their child's father would enhance his rights and increase his control over parenting arrangements. Furthermore, any contact with the father would, according to some of my participants, be detrimental to their child.

The current policy approach to child maintenance encourages parents to create a family-based arrangement[124] rather than asking the state to intervene (DWP, 2013c). As explored in Chapter Three, this new approach has been developed as part of the

[123] Legally, these issues are dealt with separately and paying maintenance does not lead to an automatic right of contact (Bryson et al. 2015).
[124] This is an agreement between both the resident and non-resident parent regarding financial support.

Child Maintenance Service (CMS) that replaced the Child Support Agency (CSA) in 2013. However, the withdrawal of state support in the facilitation and delivery of maintenance fails to consider the often-complex reasons couples separate as well as the emotional impact of these separations. Research by Andrews et al. (2011), suggests that the relationship between non-partnered parents is important in facilitating child maintenance arrangements. According to Skinner (2013), when there is no meaningful relationship with the child's mother and the child themselves, there is little incentive for the father to pay. As my participants reported, being estranged from the child's father, it was unlikely he would offer financial support. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of the mothers to pursue maintenance. However, as this research has found, they are unwilling to do so. This stalemate makes the private arrangements advocated by the CMS unhelpful.

Being unable to come to a private agreement with the absent father means mothers would have to go through the CMS to make a claim. However, some of my participants were reluctant to pursue this route because of the £20 access fee. Brooke was estranged from the father and talked about her attitude towards child maintenance:

> *'No. I just can't be bothered – it's just effort. And another point – you've got to pay £20 just to get a bit of money from him – it's a joke.'*

The introduction of the £20 charge acts as an additional barrier for mothers seeking maintenance because the low income of my participants means they simply cannot afford to pay it. Research commissioned by the DWP has found the fee to be the main reason lone parents are actively choosing not to use the CMS (Patel et al. 2016b). Similar to Brooke, other low-income lone mothers may not believe the fee justifies the service provided by the CMS and any subsequent payments they receive. Mothers not living with the father of their child (but still in a relationship that was often characterised by breaks from each other) reported they had made the decision not to ask for money. This was because they recognised that the father could not afford it because he wasn't working and that he contributed in other ways. Robyn,

whose partner was currently at university, explained they were in a long-distance relationship and they had agreed he couldn't afford to offer financial support:

> *'We looked at the finances and was completely honest; traveling to [place of university] is a lot of money. And he actually helps me out in other ways. I know that one day he will be in a position to help me out and if there's anything I need and he does have money, he would always help.'*

Robyn explained her daughter's father was dependent on higher education loans and grants meaning his income was very limited. She also pointed to other support he gave her such as getting up at night with their daughter when he stayed at her home.

Similar to Robyn, Trinity, 16, who had a 6-month-old daughter, was in a relationship with her child's father and although she understood he couldn't support her financially because he wasn't employed, she often became frustrated:

> *'He's [father] not working at the moment. He doesn't really seem to be looking for a job and his parents don't help at all. I do go round his house and I do say 'your parents should help if you're not working.' It should be their [father's parents] thing to buy nappies and milk when I come over. I don't see why I should bring my own all the time and they just don't seem to want to bother really. But's it's fine – I've got my mum and she does her bit. But I think [child's father] could be doing more to provide financially.'*

Trinity currently lived at home with her mother, her two younger siblings and her one-year-old daughter. She explained that her mother did not ask her for a financial contribution and paid for things such as the food shopping which really helped Trinity who, just having finished her GCSEs, was currently saving to attend university within the next two years. While Trinity felt her partner should get a job, she felt his parents should do more to help as her own mother did. She explained she would like to live with her partner in the near future in their own home and he would have to get a job to make that happen. Research with young fathers suggests they are often poor and

lack material resources (Neale and Davies, 2015). This suggests many young fathers may struggle to provide child maintenance. The responses by Robyn and Trinity show that they understand their partner's limited financial resources. However, even low-income fathers are required to pay £7 per week once they turn 20[125] (Child Maintenance Service, 2017). Couples usually perceive their relationship to be based on love and mutual support, however this can often mask gender inequalities especially as they play out in money and budgeting (Burgoyne et al. 2006). The 'negotiations' between Robyn and Trinity and their respective partners therefore represents an unequal power dynamic.

Only one of participants, Evie, was claiming maintenance through the CMS. This had only been finalized recently and Evie felt she couldn't comment on how it was working as she had only received two payments. There are wider issues of using the CMS for lone mothers in regards to payments. Current regulations mean maintenance can be reduced if the child/ren spend a certain number of nights in the home of the non-resident parent. There are different levels of reduction from a seventh (for children saying 52 to 103 nights with the non-resident parent) to 50 per cent[126] if the child stays more than 175 nights (Child Maintenance Service, 2017). This could prove problematic for low-income mothers, whose outgoing costs are unlikely to be substantially reduced even if the child stays with the other partner.

For the other mothers receiving child maintenance the arrangement was an informal agreement between themselves and their former partner. However, the money was usually given as small irregular payments. Zoe's former partner worked irregularly and consequently Zoe only received money occasionally. She told me of their arrangement:

[125] Non-resident fathers under 20 are not required to pay maintenance if they are in full time education.
[126] Plus an extra £7 per child, per week.

'Now and again – when he [father] feels like it. He either buys clothes or like if I say he [son] needs a new pair of trainers so tomorrow he'll [father] buy them. I suppose any help is good but it could be better.'

Unreliable child maintenance payments are not uncommon and research suggests it is younger mothers who are least likely to receive regular payments. Toomse and Maplethorpe (2010) found that 30 per cent of lone mothers aged 18-29 receiving maintenance were paid irregularly and a further 11 per cent reported only receiving partial payments. It is therefore not surprising to find that lone mothers tend to view maintenance as an unreliable source of income (Ridge and Millar, 2011). The irregularity of Zoe's support meant she could not depend on maintenance to help her with budgeting. Indeed, within the interview she explained she tended to see maintenance as the opportunity to buy her son new clothes, rather than use it for items such as food. The unreliability of this source of income for lone mothers also raises the issue of unequal power dynamics between separated parents with the non-resident fathers having control over how much, how often and indeed if he will provide financial support.

With the absence of consistent financial support from her former partner, Zoe reported she occasionally asked her mum for help. As most of the mothers struggled on their limited income and did not receive support from their child's father, they turned to others – usually their own mother - for financial support[127]. My participants asked for help on an ad hoc basis and requests were generally saved for emergencies such as buying food or to pay for important items they could not afford themselves.

Kylie, 25, who reported struggling financially explained her mum was disabled and unable to work so when she needed money urgently, she tended to ask other family members:

[127] Needing to ask for financial help was only relevant for mothers who lived away from the family home. Indeed, as explored in the previous chapter, mothers living in the family home reported much greater financial security than those who were not.

'My younger sister, she works, she lives with my parents so she's always got something in the bank. So if I went to her, she's ok. She'll be like 'ok as long as I get it back on Thursday'. And my dad I do owe him quite a lot of money but I know if I was really stuck he would be there to help me.'

Nine of the mothers in my research reported their mother would be the first person they would go to if they needed extra support. Lilly, 24, lived with her partner and two daughters, one aged 3 years and he other 6 months. When Lilly became pregnant at 17 she had just left the care of social services and moved back home with her mother. Her partner soon joined her and they both lived in an annex that was set up in the garden. However, it was unsuitable for a baby but Lilly and her partner had no way of affording their own place without help:

'Eventually my mum was like – right you're moving into your own flat now and paid two hundred and fifty pounds, which we wouldn't have had at the time so that was helpful. And [partner] needed a new moped, about six or seven hundred quid a couple of months ago and my mum put six hundred towards it so that was helpful cause he wouldn't have been able to get to work.'

These responses by participants suggest the family, as an informal network of support, is important for lone and partnered mothers. The role of kin as an informal network of family support is clearly important to young mothers whether they are lone mothers or living with a partner. While the support given by family members was usually small amounts and seldom given, the mothers appreciated the help they received – even when they had to pay this money back. Financial support from family members was particularly useful in emergency situations such to buy food or baby formula in addition to supporting the mothers with events in their life such as moving into their own home. Families therefore act as an important 'safety net' for some of the participants. However, this type of support was not available for all mothers with some of them not having relatives who could afford to give or lend them money and for a small number of participants – not having any family they could ask.

Other research looking at informal money giving and lending has found low-income families draw on both family members and friends (Hall and Perry, 2013). However, lending money from friends was not a phenomenon that any of my participants reported. This may in part reflect their age as research indicates young people (under 25) are less likely to ask their peers to borrow money compared to adults aged 25 to 39 (Finlay, 2013). It may also be in part due to their limited friendship networks. As explored in Chapter Five, my participants have limited social networks and had often become segregated from their friends due to parenthood. Furthermore, friends my participants did have were often young lone mothers themselves meaning they would also have limited financial resources, arguably making it more difficult for my participants to ask. Other research looking at friendships amongst young mothers has found they tend to distinguish between practical support provided by families, and emotional and social support provided by friends (Ellis-Sloan and Tamplin, 2019). Thus, friends do not seem to be a source of financial support for this group of young women.

As discussed in this section, very few of the mothers were in receipt of child maintenance and those who were received small, irregular payments. Furthermore, while most mothers had family they could draw on if they needed money, these were usually small payments or reserved for urgent items, money from family usually acted as a loan and mothers would pay it back. With limited financial in-formal support available to them, my participants often had to depend on more formal practices such as the state, charities and financial institutions to help meet financial shortfalls. The next section will explore the role of the state and charities for young mothers and how they utilise these types of services.

7.3 Bridging the Financial Gaps and Making Ends Meet on a Low Income: Financial Support and Support In-kind from the State, Loan Providers and Charities

During interviews, mothers reported two sources of state related support: applications to their local council's Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) and budgeting loans (BL) from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Four mothers

reported they had received help from the LWA and 2 mothers had received at least one BL from the social fund. Four of my participants had applied to both. Eight of the mothers also reported using in-kind support from food and/or baby banks (delivered by charities) to provide them with additional support.

Robyn had used a baby bank[128]. She had found this helpful in providing clothes for her baby daughter. She has also received help from the local council when moving into her flat but reported mixed feelings about their procedures:

> *'I had the basics but I didn't have a bed or mattress for long time so yeah I was sleeping on the sofa for quite a while. And they [the local council] don't do emergency payments, they do goods so they gave me a divan bed and mattress. Which was good but obviously it was like carpets and things like that that I needed the money towards. I was happy to stay on the sofa. When it was freezing in the flat and we were walking around with no carpets. They were like prioritising what I could and couldn't have. They assumed I needed a bed over carpet but I had a baby and actually I could just sleep on the sofa.'*

When I interviewed Robyn, her flat still wasn't carpeted. While Robyn appreciated the bed and mattress, she would have liked to have been more involved in the decision-making process. Four other mothers also reported similar experiences. Zara for example applied for a fridge, cooker and washing machine. The council gave her a washing machine and fridge despite her preference being a fridge and cooker to allow her to prepare food.

LWA delivered via local councils is a relatively new phenomenon. As explored in Chapter Three under the Welfare Reform Act 2012, the Social Fund (SF) was restructured in 2012 with the other discretionary elements (Community Care Grants

[128] Baby banks are similar to food banks and provide baby and toddler related items such as nappies, bottles and clothes (Bloomer, 2013).

and Crisis Loans) abolished. This was replaced with support through local councils[129] which offer non–cash goods such as furniture and vouchers for supermarkets and pre-payment utilities top-ups.[130] This is in contrast Community Care Grants (CCG) and Crisis Loans (CL) that were given via cash paid directly to the applicant. Prior to the withdrawal of the CCG, the DWP commissioned some research looking at the priorities of the applicants. The findings suggested that while applicants to the service were happy to receive vouchers as opposed to cash, they wanted to retain control over the choice of goods as well as the make and model (White, 2011). Similar to my participants, users valued having control over which items the money is used for. However, by making decisions on applicants' behalf, at least some local LWAs are disempowering those in need by removing the element of choice around which goods they receive.

LWA schemes also give emergency supermarket vouchers for food and clothing as well as vouchers to pay for electricity and gas on pre-payment accounts. Kylie had applied for LWA twice. On moving into her social home 8 months ago she had made an application for some household items and had received a washing machine and a cooker. When Kylie's Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) was stopped, she applied once more to the LWA as well as a food bank. Like many of the mothers, Kylie utilized a number of formal support networks at one time:

> *'When my money completely stopped once, I can't remember why that was, I had to go to food bank and I also had to get a card off the council for money for like clothes and food and electric and stuff.'*

Kylie had also taken out two budgeting loans in the past nine months: one to decorate her flat and one to buy Christmas presents for her son. Budgeting Loans (BL) are

[129] This is for England only. Different arrangements are in place in Scotland, Wales and N. Ireland.

[130] According to (Gibbons, 2015) around a third of local schemes do offer cash payments. However, this was not applicable to any of the councils in the areas where my participants lived.

another form of state support that are important to mothers' formal support network. These loans form part of the remaining Deregulated Social Fund and are delivered by Job Centre Plus. These types of loans (paid in cash) can be taken out for a number of purposes including buying items such as clothes, furniture and costs linked to moving home (Shelter, 2018d). In my research I found participants tended to take out BLs to pay for Christmas and Birthday celebrations for their children. Mothers explained they were unable to pay for items such as gifts and parties on their limited income and lending money was their only way to make sure their children could benefit from these important social occasions. Maria had requested a BL a year ago to cover the costs associated with her daughter's first birthday and was given £812 – the maximum families with children can borrow (Shelter, 2018d). Despite almost paying it back[131], with her daughter's second birthday approaching Maria had to take out another one:

> *'I've had a budgeting loan – the first one I go out is £812 I think it is and what I done is I requested for another one for yesterday, [daughter's] birthday is coming up, to see if they would give me another one 'cause a lot of people tell me they don't. And what they've done they've given me what I've already paid back. So now I'm now paying the £800 back again.'*

Maria had found herself in a cycle of borrowing money, paying it back and then borrowing the same amount again. While Maria lived at home with her mother and did not struggle financially, she still needed extra support for occasional extra costs. BL's are paid back via direct deductions to benefits such as Income Support (IS) or universal credit.[132] Maria would have her IS reduced by around £30 every fortnight until it was repaid.

Paying for celebrations was not the only reason for borrowing money. When many mothers moved into their social home they were often without wallpaper, carpets

[131] There is no interest charged on budgeting loans.
[132] The system of borrowing is very similar under UC although the loans are called Budgeting Advances rather than Budgeting Loans.

and curtains. As their income barely provides enough for necessities such as food they would have not been able to afford to decorate their homes. Taylor, 16 had moved into a social rented home almost a year ago.[133] Taylor reported she was struggling financially:

> *'Housing benefit pays the rent except for the service charge. I do struggle to pay cause I'm under 18, I get less money than people over 18. Last year I took out a budgeting loan, it was to do my flat up cause I'd just moved in. It kind of messed me up though cause now I'm struggling a bit.'*

While Taylor, 17, who has a two-year-old son received housing benefit to pay her rent, this did not cover the service charge[134] of her flat. As her IS was paid at the lower rate because of her age[135] she had even less money than other lone mothers. Currently nearly £20 was being deducted out of Taylor's IS every fortnight to replay the BL. Lone mothers represent the largest group using a BL to make up financial shortfalls. In the financial year 2017-18, 36.5 per cent of approved applications were to lone mothers (DWP, 2018d). This suggests BLs are a common form of support for this group of women.

The responses from my participants suggest both LWA and BLs act as important forms of support and mothers. Despite mothers drawing on this additional support, three of

[133] As explored in the previous chapter, the policy around young mothers and housing mean those under 20 are encouraged to live at home or when that isn't possible, in mother and baby supported accommodation. Taylor wasn't sure why she had been able to get a home at 16 but she has previously been in the care of social services meaning they could have signed for the tenancy on her behalf. One of the practitioners I interviewed talked about the use of tenancies for those under 18 years old. She explained they were very unusual but sometimes social services do sign on the young mother's behalf.

[134] The service charge is paid in addition to the rent and covers costs such as building insurance and repairs (Webb and Hance, 2013).

[135] The current rules around IS mean lone mothers get a reduced amount (currently £115.80 per fortnight rather than £146.20) until they are 18. As already explored, under UC rules this, lone mothers will have to be 25 before they can receive the higher equivalent rate.

them still reported borrowing money from more formal institutions such as the credit union and doorstep lenders.

Maria, as mentioned previously, had taken out a couple of BLs to pay for her daughter's birthdays. Additionally, she had taken out a £500 loan from a credit union to buy clothes and furniture for her daughter. However, Maria reported struggling with the repayments and had ceased paying the loan back:

> *'I've also go a credit union loan that I'm paying for, but I've stopped paying for it. [The loan was for] £500 so I'm meant to be paying thirteen pound back a week. I think it's a joke cause they take your pay back out of your child benefit and I only get paid £20 child benefit. So they're taking £13 and only leaving you with £7.'*

Carla reported despite being careful with her money. Providing a 'good Christmas' for her children was impossible even with herself and her partner working. Therefore, she was dependent on a loan from a credit union:

> *'I've got a credit union loan. Child benefit covers that, it goes straight into that account, I don't see that. There's twenty-four pounds left over but I just tell them to take that to pay that off. I had a thousand pound off them at Christmas. And then I finished paying it off in July and then I get re-financed and put that away for Christmas again this year.'*

Similar to Maria using BLs for her daughter's birthday each year, Carla utilised a credit union to pay for Christmas, paying it off within the seven months after Christmas and then borrowing again. Credit Unions are not-for-profit co-operatives run for and owned by their members (Tischer et al. 2015). According to Caldwell (2018) credit unions can provide a better alternative to banks because of lower fee levels and by lending to people who would otherwise have difficulty being accepted for a loan. Thus, this alternative to banks is likely to act as an important network of support for my participants, allowing them to borrow money even with their low income.

In addition to paying back BLs and credit union loans, five mothers also reported other debts with utility payments and council tax. Robyn told me about a debt she was trying to resolve:

> *'It was council tax debt from the last place. I set up a payment plan with them and they said they were gonna take it out of my income support and I said that was fine even though I was struggling for money. And they said they would take it out of income support every week but they didn't take it. And then I had a letter come through from enforcement agents saying they were gonna come and I've had to dispute it and they sent me a letter with a further charge of a hundred pounds.'*

Robyn was receiving support from her Local Citizens Advice regarding her council tax debt and was hoping she could set up an agreement before any other action was taken against her. Carla reported she had water debt related to her previous property:

> *'It's going to court so they'll deal with it in the courts. Hopefully they should only take about five pound a month 'cause obviously we can't afford to pay much.'*

Carla explained she had to accumulate this debt as she couldn't afford to look after her daughter on her own (prior to her meeting her current partner) and pay all her bills. While court proceedings will hopefully find a resolution for Carla, they are likely to leave her with a County Court Judgment (CCJ). A CCJ is court order that stipulates a creditor is owed money and allows them to take various actions to recover the debt (Step Change, 2019). The CCJ is included on a person's credit file for six years and consequently it will be harder for Carla to access financial services in the future. The number of CCJs filed has increased in recent years with low-income families most affected (Inamn, 2017). The number of lone parents seeking debt advice has also risen faster than any other group. The debt charity 'Step Change' (2018) found the percentage of their clients who are lone parents had increased from 14 per cent in

2014 to 23 per cent in 2018. The age at which my participants experience debt is particularly concerning and this could potentially become a long term problem for some of them due to their low incomes and lone motherhood status.

Similar to many of my participants, Carla's network of financial support came from a number of sources. In addition to the credit union, she had received £100 in supermarket vouchers and a £30 token to put on her electric key meter from the LWA. She had also used a food bank on a number of occasions with vouchers issued by her housing support worker. Carla told me about her experience with the food bank:

> *'The one I go to, they're really friendly. They give you a certain amount for how many people you've got then they have extra fresh bread and stuff where you can just help yourself to it.'*

Seven of the mothers in my research had used a food bank at least once and five of them used (or had previously used) them regularly. Survey data suggests food bank usage is not uncommon amongst young lone mothers. In the financial year 2016/17, almost 20 per cent of lone parent families used a food bank (Loopsta et al. 2018). The researchers further argued that as lone parent families only make up around 10 per cent of households, they are considerably overrepresented in emergency food provision. Research suggests the percentage of young mothers using food banks is even higher with 27 per cent reporting they had used a food bank at least once (Young Women's Trust, 2017b). Four of my participants had accessed a baby bank once, usually shortly after their child was born. Unlike food banks, the research surrounding baby banks is more limited. In 2018 Channel 4 aired *Born on the Breadline*, an investigative documentary (and subsequent written report) looking at the growth of baby banks in the UK. The report noted baby banks do not usually collate data on their service users but the limited data available suggests that around one in one hundred families had used a baby bank and 50 per cent of these were lone-parent families (Aiken et al. 2018). Lone-parent families make up less than a quarter of families with dependent children in the UK (ONS, 2017b). Thus, similar to

food banks, they are overrepresented within baby bank provision. This highlights the limited income for many lone-parent families and the importance of emergency food and baby items as formal support networks.

7.4 An Extra Helping Hand: The role of Non-Financial Support Services

This chapter has so far focused on the formal and informal support sources mothers draw on to meet financial shortfalls. However, it is not only monetary support that was important to them. Non-financial service such as support workers, children centre groups and education providers were also important to and valued by young mothers. In the section that follows, I focus on three main areas of support: housing, education and children centres[136]. There are two reasons for this. The first is these were all key areas within the original TPS and, as this section will demonstrate, all have been subject to reductions. The other reason is that these three areas were highlighted most by my research participants (mothers and practitioners).

As explored in Chapters Two and Six, when the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) published its report into teenage pregnancy and parenthood in 1999, the emphasis was placed on providing targeted housing and associated support for young mothers. During my fieldwork I contacted two organisations that provided housing for this group of young women. Despite not asking during the interviews about their experience of the housing support[137], the participants told me voluntarily the support they received via the housing worker was highly valued.[138]

[136] The TPS also focused on health outcomes. I have briefly considered some aspects of health and service reductions. Young mothers did not consider them in detail and I did not seek permission to interview health care practitioners because of the ethical process (discussed in Chapter Four).
[137] This was because I was concerned mothers would be worried I would report this back to the person who recruited them, despite assurances of confidentiality.
[138] Riley was the exception of this, who told me she did not find it helpful and did not believe her support worker responded well to her needs.

Lucy had been housed in a mother and baby accommodation when 3 months pregnant. This was unusual as almost all of the other mothers in my research were living in a hostel right up until their child was born. Lucy had experienced domestic violence from the father of her newborn son and reported feeling isolated as she didn't have any close friends. However, she reported an improvement in her life once she had moved in to the mother and baby accommodation:

> *'Living here [in mother and baby accommodation] I've made some really good friends with the people that live here, so it's quite helpful because they're all new mums, like first time mums, so they come to me for questions because I've got the experience and like if I'm stuck I ask them because they might have experience in that part where I didn't.'*

Lucy reported feeling very comfortable living around other young mums and also identified the support she received as being very positive:

> *'I'm not moving out [laughs]. I've got to eventually I know but yes, it's really nice, it's home and because of the support that we get on the weekly basis.*

The housing support available for young mums is the legacy of both the Teenage Pregnancy report published by the SEU in 1999 and the Teenage Parent Supported Housing (TPSH) project, piloted between 2009 and 2011. The report by the SEU advocated that teenage mothers remain in the family home[139], and subsequent policy focused on providing targeted supported housing places in exceptional circumstances[140] for young mothers rather than giving them social housing tenancies immediately (Giullari and Shaw, 2005). As explored in Chapter Two, this policy was developed in 2009 with the introduction of the TPSH, providing enhanced support for teenage parents (mainly mothers) in England. Funding for this project came via central government and was distributed amongst seven local authorities who were

[139] According to Giullari and Shaw (2005) this was linked to New Labour's wider approach of replacing some elements of state intervention with family support.
[140] For young mothers who couldn't live with their families.

asked to pilot enhanced support packages such as help with budgeting and parenting classes for young mothers[141] (Johnson and Quiligars, 2010). An evaluation of the pilots conducted by Quilgars et al. (2011) found a number of positive outcomes including better budgeting skills, being able to live independently without additional service support, and better parenting skills.[142] Young parents also reported positive outcomes including better access to long-term accommodation, having access to practitioners who didn't stigmatise them, and improved self-esteem. As explored in Chapter Two, the Coalition Government decided not to continue with the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (TPS) as part of its overall approach to reduce public services. Many of the provisions linked to the TPS including the TPSH were withdrawn as a consequence of austerity. Despite central Government funding ceasing in March 2011, some local authorities continued to support such schemes by funding third sector organisations and housing associations to provide housing for young mothers with associated support.

Despite the TPSH evaluation suggesting supported accommodation for young mothers can improve their situations, both of the housing charities I engaged with for my research were currently redesigning their services. Dedicated housing support for young mothers is now being reduced as the local council seeks to cope with reductions in its budget. According to Gray and Barford, 2018 local councils in England had, on average, a budget that was 23.7 per cent smaller in 2016-17 compared to 2009-10. Those most affected by budget reductions are those already materially disadvantaged (Hastings et al. 2017), and mothers[143] (Wakefield, 2019). In addition to reductions in funding, all of the practitioners I interviewed argued that local councils were purposely targeting services for young mothers because the teenage pregnancy rate had decreased to a certain level. The successes of the TPS overwhelmingly focused on the reduction in teenage pregnancy rates in young women under 18 (see

[141] Support was given to mothers in temporary mother and baby accommodation as well as floating support to those living with families or in social housing.
[142] While there were no considerable improvements regarding health and access to education and/or employment, the pilots were generally considered successful.
[143] Women as a group have been affected but mothers in particular according to Wakefield (2019).

DCSF and DoH, 2010; Hadley et al. 2016; Skinner and Marino, 2016 for example). As this type of evaluation neglects the outcomes of young mothers who have benefited from TPS related funding, it is difficult for local councils to understand the importance of these services and the potential consequences of withdrawing it.

Both of the housing organisations who acted as gatekeepers for my research offered mother and baby accommodation (as well as associated support) for women aged 16-25. However, under the new guidelines given by the local council who fund their services, they had to target mothers of all ages. Bren was one of the practitioners I interviewed who worked in housing related support. She was very concerned about the restructuring of mother and baby accommodation and the associated support, and argued young mothers were much more in need of this:

> *'Often they [young mothers] are living at [their own parent's] home and it's deemed fine for them to remain at home until their child is five regardless of anything else. I think that's probably the biggest difficulty of how do you actually get out of that house? You can't afford to rent somewhere privately, there's no council housing – that has a massive impact. Whereas I feel if you're kind of that bit older you're more likely to have left home already so you've kind of got your foot on that ladder elsewhere.'*

Young mothers living with their family are disadvantaged when bidding[144] for properties on the local social housing register. When I interviewed Bren she explained that councils usually consider young mothers living with families as adequately housed. Mother and baby accommodation is advantageous because it is considered temporary accommodation, and thus, mothers will be allocated a higher housing band.[145]

[144] This process involves mothers signing onto their online account once a week and selecting properties they would like.

[145] Local councils using banding to decide which groups are priority for social housing. The higher the band, the higher the priority for housing. Those in temporary accommodation are considered homeless and the mothers in my research were all placed in the top band.

Indeed, as explored in Chapter Six, my participants view mother and baby accommodation as an important step into their own social home. Bren also explained that they were being forced to restructure their provision despite the demand for housing amongst young mothers increasing. She explained three years ago, only 5 mothers were on their waiting list. At the time of interview, the number had risen to 70. Accommodation also came with support from a dedicated worker. A variety of support was provided including visits from support workers to staff living on the premises 24 hours a day in some circumstances – providing high level support and intervention. Bren also explained their intervention had increased significantly in recent years as a consequence of changes in housing and social security:

> *'Housing is a big thing – it's massively changed. And the benefits system had massively changed - people are in much more difficult circumstances than they were initially. We're doing a lot more crisis intervention that we do before. And I think the real challenge with young parents is they sometimes take a long to trust you. It's harder to engage in a way, you have to be really persistent.'*

Bren and her colleagues also supported mothers in tasks such as applying for school places, registering to vote and picking up emergency goods from food banks. According to Bren, young mothers have much higher support needs that older mothers because of their age. Bren explained that despite the changes they were required to make, they were not being given additional funding meaning they would not be able to increase the number of mothers they supported at one time. As explored in the previous chapter, many of young women are waiting months in hostels to access mother and baby accommodation. Not having access to age related accommodation is likely to increase the waiting times with many being forced to spend time in bed and breakfasts and other unsuitable accommodation. As part of the Homelessness Suitability of Accommodation (England) Order 2003, children and pregnant women are not supposed to be housed in a bed and breakfast for more than six weeks. However, research indicates hundreds of families are spending much longer periods in this type of unsuitable accommodation (Department for

Communities and Local Government, 2016). Indeed, as noted already within this chapter, they are often considered by councils to be appropriate for pregnant women up to the seventh month of their pregnancy (Cirone and Casey, 2017). With these multiple issues impacting on temporary accommodation for young lone mothers, they are likely to find themselves in highly precarious situations despite the increased vulnerability of being pregnant and homeless.

Reductions in service provision for young mothers was not just limited to housing support. Evie had been assigned a support worker to help her develop a number of skills including budgeting and help completing forms. Her support worker was part of an organisation that helped young people and Evie reported greatly benefiting from this service:

> *'The person who I was supported by, they help support people that are in that age range 16 to 25. They help with like budgeting their money, they do cooking classes, they do absolutely everything, they encourage you into education, they really help you. And they helped me as well - a lot. But my support worker has been let go and a lot of them have.'*

Evie explained reductions to the funding had led to her support worker being made redundant and she had not been assigned a replacement. My fieldwork also identified other services for young mothers that had been reduced. In one city where I conducted my fieldwork, an education college that catered solely for mothers up to age of 22 had recently been closed. The college gave young mothers the opportunity to gain qualifications such as GCSEs and access courses with the aim of improving their chances of gaining paid work and accessing higher education.

As already explored in this thesis, teenage mothers are less likely to leave school with qualifications compared to their peers (Imamura et al. 2007; Corlyon and Stock, 2013). The college aimed to change this by giving young mothers educational opportunities in a supportive environment. Two of my participants, Enid and Evie, had

benefited from the college and both had gone onto to further study.[146] Evie praised the college and credited them with her transition from working in a shop to entering higher education. She also told me of her disappointment at its closure:

> *'I just feel quite lucky and privileged that I had it but I feel sad that other people aren't going to have the life that I had.'*

Enid who had become pregnant at 14 reported that she did not find her school teachers very supportive. She wasn't allowed to return to school as they did not believe they could support her. Enid was instead put in touch with the education college which was able to cater to her needs while pregnant and after her son was born:

> *'I weren't even allowed back [to school] or anything when I was pregnant. And then I hear about [young mum's college[147]] and my school transferred me to them but they were so nice there and they supported me, like all of us [young mothers] so well. And I could still do my work and my little boy could come with me. That's what I liked about it.'*

Providing a holistic approach in a non-judgmental atmosphere was beneficial to mothers, and providing on-site childcare allowed mothers to be close to their children. Indeed, other mothers in my research who were hoping to return to education also expressed their disappointment in the college closing and had concerns other colleges would not be able to meet their needs. Robyn was planning to return to college to study for her GCSEs in Maths and English to prepare her to do an access to higher education course. She would have preferred to attend the education college for young mothers:

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[146] As explored in Chapter Six, Enid was currently studying a hairdressing course at college and Evie was at university studying Psychology.
[147] The name of the college has been removed here.

'Yeah just that they [young mothers' college] specify young mums so they would understand more than just a state college that don't necessarily have that awareness and understanding of my situation.'

Attending a local college would involve Robyn catching two buses and access would be dependent on whether she could find a nursery place for her daughter. Ann who had been involved in running the young mothers' college argued childcare was a major barrier for young mothers and not having onsite childcare caused issues when it came to accessing education:

'Placing babies in nurseries, there's not as many places as there used to be. So it's a lot of pressure for them to work it out. Generally speaking, not wanting to stereotype but the majority of young mothers don't have parental support so they're unlikely to be able to go to their family and say 'can you look after baby while I go to college?' It often isn't there for them.'

As explored in the previous chapter, childcare is a major barrier for young mothers looking to pursue education. The education college offered onsite childcare for the mother studying there, thus removing a significant barrier. The free transport (usually taxis) also enabled easier access for this group of women who, as Ann explained, did not generally drive or have access to a car.

Ava, told me about her first visit to the Job Centre to claim income support when she was pregnant. As explored in the previous chapter, Ava did not finish school but wanted to go back and complete her GCSEs and eventually study Art. The appointment included a session with a careers adviser that Ava did not find helpful:

'There was a careers adviser they bought it for young people but I don't think she'd had any dealing with teenage mums before. And she came in and was telling me where to get an education, this was a month before I moved back with my mum but she was telling me I should start education and she was saying I should start a course in September but I was due [to give birth] in

October. But it was just like 'I'm having my baby in October – I can't be on a full time course in September while 9 months pregnant.' I don't know – she just had no idea. It just seemed so ridiculous.'

Ava's experience at the Job Centre suggests career advisers brought in to support young people are trained to give general advice, rather than tailored support for young pregnant women. According to Ann who worked at the young mother's college until it closed, young mothers have unique educational needs. As young people they are likely to want to be engaged in education but unlike other young people, have childcare responsibilities. Ann further argued that the reduction to local services for young mothers had been a consequence of central government and their austerity agenda. She argued the withdraw on funding associated with the TPS would lead to increases in pregnancy amongst young women:

'The teenage pregnancy rate has dropped over the past several years because of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy and everything that was put in place to implement that but all of those things are being taken away. So what do they think is gonna happen? They've fixed it – it'd gone away – I don't think so. I think it's going to start creeping up.'

Ann explained there were currently over 150 young mothers aged under 19 alone within the geographic areas she worked and little consideration had been given to them when the young mothers' college closed. The Framework for Supporting Teenage Mothers and Young Fathers continues to emphasise the lack of educational attainment amongst young mothers and the need to make improvements (Public Health England, 2017). However, withdrawing targeted educational support for them such as colleges specifically for young mothers, will make it much harder for them to engage in education.

Both Ann and Carol (another education practitioner who also worked at the college before it closed) were still employed to provide floating educational based support for young mothers. Both took mothers to college open days, arranged interviews for

them, and even used their cars to take them there when needed. However, their roles often went beyond education-based advice and Ann summarised the support they provide as '***empowering them [young mothers] to live independently and move through life confidently.'*** They also provided one-on-one parenting classes, putting them in touch with children centres, supporting them with getting their children into nursery and being involved in safeguarding including cases of sexual exploitation and domestic violence. Carol also argued the role provided by Ann and herself went beyond providing education-based support and explained commissioners do not always understand the high support needs young mothers have:

> *'A lot of it will be about building their confidence, a lot of the women we work with have anxiety, low confidence, have possibly not been in education for a long time so needing their confidence building up, sometimes just to make a phone call. We've taken them down to the sexual health clinic, all those things that just helps their life become a little bit easier. We can do charity applications for them – maybe for a cot or simple things like a sling. Our main goal is to get them back into education, or that's what we were tasked with when given this role but we've had to fight to say 'there's actually quite a lot of barriers before we can actually get them [young mothers] through the college door'.*

Carol's approach to supporting young mothers highlights some of the wider issues with the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (TPS). According to Brand et al. (2014), one of the problems with policy directed at teenage mothers is the focus on education and individual responsibility at the expense of the more immediate concerns of young mothers. As explored in Chapter Two, the TPS (SEU, 1999) focused on reducing social exclusion amongst young mothers by encouraging them into education and employment. The current Framework for support teenage mothers and young father as designed by Public Health England (2017) also focuses on education and improving child health outcomes but neglects more immediate concerns such as being able to attend a sexual health clinic. As Carol's experience suggests, some young mothers have more immediate needs to be addressed. Providing support such as applying for

charitable grants and taking them to appointments can really make a difference to their lives. As explored in Chapter Six, a number of the mothers in this research raised their lack of confidence as a barrier to education and Carol's pre-college work with them, may help build their confidence to allow them to pursue their educational aspirations. However, neither the TPS or the current framework for teenage mothers and young fathers (PHE, 2017) considers these types of support and how the lack of access to these may act as a barrier to education.

Within her interview Carol also talked about the lack of provision for young mothers interested in pursuing education. She explained that the young mothers college had allowed students to just study for their Maths and English GCSEs. They found the relatively small amount of class time encouraged mothers to attend. However mainstream colleges do not allow young people to do this:

> *'Our provision has been taken away but it has not been replaced by anything. So I think our biggest barrier on the education side is than no one is offering stand alone GCSEs in Maths and English which is what a lot of our young parents need 'cause potentially they've missed out on that in year 11 so they might not have the GCSEs then need to get into college.'*

Carol explained that current college provision means that young people wanting to do GCSEs also had to take another course such as an NVQ that required them to be at college more often. Carol was critical of this and explained mothers often wanted to do just do Math and English because it reduced the amount of time they needed childcare (and to be away from the child) and because they only needed the Maths and English GCSE to get onto further education courses such as A Levels.

While both Ann and Carol were employed to provide education-based support, it was clear their role went well beyond this. By reducing educational resources for young mothers, local councils are also restricting access to other services such as sexual health. Furthermore, Ann and Carol were also taking on additional roles that had been lost as a consequence of funding reductions. As explored already within this

section, Evie's support worker had been made redundant and Ann, whom she had met when she attended the college for young mothers, had started undertaking many of the tasks her support worker had previously done. While conducting my fieldwork, many organisations I had identified as potential gatekeepers to my participants had closed or were no longer providing services for young mothers. As one practitioner who had previously supported young mothers told me over the phone: *'it was all the rage 10 years ago.'* I also found one area previously had a teenage pregnancy midwife and a health visitor for young parents. Both of these positions had also been withdrawn. The reduction in services for young mothers means that the few practitioners remaining such as Bren, Ann and Carol have to take on additional responsibilities. This reduction in service provision for young mothers highlights the expansion of service provision between 1999 and 2010 when funding was available through the TPS to support young women who had become young mothers. However, with local funding currently only covering pregnancy prevention strategies (Teenage Pregnancy Independent Advisory Group, 2010), young women are marginalised as service users once they become mothers. This contraction of service provision highlights how young mothers have been targeted through austerity related policies.

While doing my fieldwork I also found that the provision for young mothers through children centres had been reduced. As the income of my participants was limited, they are more dependent on free services such as 'stay and play' if they want to engage in social activities. As explored in Chapter Five, mothers tended to avoid children centres, fearing judgment from other mothers. However, most of my participants felt differently about groups that were aimed solely at young mothers. Responses by other participants who regularly attended a young mothers group reported very positive experiences.

Having her first child at age 20, Lilly reported she felt very lonely and had sought support at a children's centre with groups targeted at young mothers but this had since closed:

'A lot of them have been shut down now, the children centres, because of funding and things like that. I mean I started going when [daughter] was a few weeks old. And it was a massive help. I mean cause I didn't really know anybody and where I was living at the time, there was nothing there, there wasn't even a bus route and I don't drive so it was very difficult at the time. She [daughter] got to know other children and I got to know mums and they were all young mums like I was. And I learnt things like how to cook. It was brilliant! And I got my Maths GCSE which I didn't get in school.'

I conducted my focus group interview sessions at two groups that were aimed at young mothers aged 16-22. Brooke who attended one of these groups told me why she enjoyed being there:

'It's so that you don't feel that you're the only one that's going through it – do you know what I mean? Like if I was, say like to my baby dad if I saw him like even though I'm not with him, if I was like 'oh yeah I'm going to a young mums group he'd be like 'oh what you doing, blah, blah, blah.' He don't get it. It's like you get that time to chill with people who are on your level, who are your age and understand. 'Cause I could be with my other friend who hasn't got kids and she tries her best to understand but, she just don't get it. Unless you've got kids - you can't.'

Maria attended the same group as Brooke and both had become friends. She told me how much she looked forward to the group each week and how she felt the age limit of the group should be extended:

'Yeah I do like it. if I'm honest, a Thursday is the only day I really look forward to. I'm in every single day so on a Thursday it is nice to come out and go and talk to other mums and for her [daughter] to go and play and things like that.'

Both Brooke and Maria highlighted the importance of meeting other young mothers who had similar experiences to them. As a group, young mothers are more likely to

experience 'relational exclusion' (Kidger, 2004, p.297). This type of exclusion refers to a lack of informal networks and few, if any, friendships. This is a common phenomenon amongst young mothers with friends becoming distant and even actively avoiding them due to their pregnancy (Alldred and David, 2010). Consequently, this group of women are more likely to report loneliness and isolation (Aria, 2007). Research by Ellis-Sloan and Tamplin (2019) found friendship to be an important source of support for young mothers, offering protection from loneliness and distress by proving companionship as well as emotional support. Comments from my participants highlight the importance of social groups for them, particularly around developing friendships. Due to their low income and reluctance to engage in more general, non-targeted services, these groups act as the only space for young mothers to make and develop friendships. While the children's centres themselves are formal networks of support, the friendships the mothers made there became extended informal networks of social and emotional support for them. The friendships young mothers made at the centres extended into their social lives more generally. Ivy and Ella had become good friends through a young mother's group and Ella talked about her relationship with Ivy outside of the sessions:

> *'We often do things. Meeting at the park, going to town – even just walking around sometimes. It's nice as I don't really have other friends and well, we just hang out and talk and my son can play with Ella's son and yeah all just nice. A few weeks ago we were in….I don't know if you know it's [shop's name] in town and they sell [hair] extensions and wigs and hair stuff. And my little one, he was messing around, throwing hair around and people were staring like. But Ivy was with me and I knew if anyone said anything to me she would support me.'*

As explored above, Brooke and Maria had also become friends through one of the children centre groups and they had also begun to spend time with each other outside of the group and phone each other when they needed someone to speak to. Maria told me about how Brooke supported her after the relationship with a partner had ended:

'She [Brooke] has been through it too and so she knows what its like. We talked and I felt better. She just told me like, not think about it and to find someone else and I did.'

These comments from mothers suggest friendships with other young mothers are highly valued by them and offer them someone to talk to, do activities with and to call on for social and emotional support. These findings contradict previous research which has found friendships between young mothers are seldom formed due to them having negative pre-conceived ideas about each other (Ellis-Sloan and Tamplin, 2019). This may reflect courtesy stigma (Goffman, 1990a) amongst young mothers who do not want to associate themselves with a stigmatised group. This research suggests, perhaps when they are continuously exposed to each other in a formal group setting (as the mothers were in my research), these existing perceptions are challenged and they bond over their mutual interests and shared experiences.

I also had the opportunity to interview Claire, who was responsible for running the young mother's group some of the mothers in this research attended. Claire emphasised the importance of the educational course but also argued the children's centres also offered other benefits:

'It's also about building up their [young mothers] own self-esteem and confidence, allowing them to meet other young parents which is massively important. A lot of them – obviously their friends don't have children and they don't feel comfortable attending other groups because they often feel like they're being looked at or judged. So for them to come together it's a real help for friendship groups.'

'I'm the stop smoking adviser here so I get a lot of stop smoking questions. We are C-Card[148] trained so they can come to us about contraception and we can give out free condoms.'

Claire also gave advice around parenting such as encouraging mothers to read to their children and how to manage discipline. Furthermore, she was involved in safeguarding the young mothers and had recently intervened when she suspected one of her service users was being groomed online for sexual exploitation. This holistic approach to supporting young mothers enabled young mothers to draw on a variety of services in one place while allowing them also to meet other young mothers. As discussed in Chapter Five, mothers tended to avoid health and social care practitioners fearing stigma and prejudice. Claire however provided non-judgmental provision and the women I interviewed clearly valued her support. Claire also talked about how the services provided for young mothers had been reduced as a consequence of funding reductions:

'We used to do meals with the parents. So in the morning our session would be from half nine until one and we would do a bit of work first and then stop and all prepare a meal together. So we'd try to look at budgeting, food hygiene, cooking skills which are massively important. We'd all cook the meal together and then come in with the children, sit at the table with the children and eat the lunch, but because of funding cuts we just haven't had the capacity to do that. But now not being able to prepare the food is a real disappointment because at the moment we're looking at healthy living and we've been looking a lot about diet and for a lot of the mums they've really struggled because they don't cook.'

'We used to provide bus fare. So a lot of our girls travel from outside the area so get a bus in and bus prices keep going up and up. So we used to be able to

[148] The C-Card Scheme allows young people aged between 13 and 24 to access free contraception such as condoms as well as access to advice. The children's centre where Claire worked could give out advice and contraception when requested.

buy bus tickets to get them here. And we used to have a trip at least once a term where we would provide transport, lunch there and entrance. Cause a lot of these families don't go out cause they can't afford it or they can't get there.'

Claire said she was concerned funding for the groups would be withdrawn completely at some point; which would severely impact on the young mothers who used the services. The closure of services such as these would mean mothers would lose both access to partitioners who supported them and also to the other young mothers whom they had developed friendships with.

7.5 Conclusion

The responses in this chapter suggest young lone mothers draw on a variety of informal and formal networks of support. Formal support consisted of both financial and non-financial. The financial support came through a range of services: local welfare assistance schemes, budgeting loans, food and baby banks and on a small number of occasions - arrangements of child maintenance through the CMS. Poverty is common amongst both young and lone mothers (LGA, 2018; Anderson, 2019) and these forms of support enable them to meet financial shortfalls in emergencies. The non-financial support mostly came from children's centres, support linked to temporary housing accommodation and local education providers. Other sources of help also included support workers directly for young people and for domestic violence survivors. The mothers often used more than one formal network at one time and also used some networks more than once in some circumstances.

Informal networks of support also consisted of both financial and non-financial support. The financial support was often given by the parents of young mothers and occasionally through a personal agreement between them and the father of their child. The financial support was minimal however and did not make a significant difference to their financial situation. Mothers were therefore overall, much more dependent on the more formal sources of financial support as explored in this chapter– especially budgeting loans and support from the LWA schemes. The non-

financial informal support largely came from other young mothers the participants met at targeted groups. From these, friendship often developed that extended beyond the groups and into the participants social lives. As young mothers are likely to experience social isolation (Aria, 2007) these friendship groups are likely to be one of the few opportunities for them to engage with peers their own age. Responses from the mothers suggested that friendships with other young mothers were highly valued.

Mothers have entitlement to these different sources of support based on their social statuses. The children's centre groups and the education related support was linked to their 'youth' status while access to the LWA and budgeting loans were linked to social class and their income. Access to the food and baby banks – often as an emergency - was also based on social class and income. Allocation of child maintenance for the mothers in this research was based on their status as lone mothers while the housing related support was accessible based on them being young mothers and women[149]. By taking an intersectional approach to exploring the lives of young mothers, this research has found the statuses they hold mean these mothers can access a wide variety of services.

This research was conducted during a period of service reduction and restructuring, and this has impacted on the services young mother's access. As part of the TPS, there was an expansion of services for young mothers, particularly around housing, education and children centres (Aria, 2009). However, as a consequence of austerity, these services have been reduced and, in some instances – removed completely. Research suggests that young women face a number of barriers when remaining or re-entering education after having a child (Evans, 2009). The closure of the education college for young mothers, as reported in this research, adds another barrier and could have long term implications for these women in establishing themselves in the labour market and gaining financial security. Indeed, research suggests that labour

[149] Access to housing and housing related support is also indirectly linked to social class and income as low-income lone mothers are likely to have less access to financial resources to secure private housing.

market participation amongst lone mothers is associated with qualifications (Rabindrakumar, 2018).

The restructuring (and in some cases removal) of children's centres also had consequences for this group of women. While children's centres were still available in most areas; as they were aimed at all mothers, most of my participants did not want to access them. The young mothers were more interested in using centres and groups aimed at young mothers because they felt they were less likely to be exposed to stigma and also allowed them to meet other young women with children. The closure of these groups reflects the reduction of funding for young mothers which formed part of the TPS as well as the wider national closure of children centres (Powell, 2019). The housing support mothers received, which was also originally part of the TPS is being streamlined and made available for all lone mothers. Some of the mothers praised the support the received as part of their accommodation. However, the streamlining of the service is highly likely to increase wait times for young mothers in terms of access. This will inevitably lead to reduced support for young mothers who need access to this service.

The mothers were also affected by changes to support that were not delivered as part of the TPS and were linked instead to their social class and income. As explored in this thesis, LWAs have replaced the CCG and CL and that were previously part of the Social Fund. The move to this new system of localised support meant mothers had little choice in the types of goods they were given and there was often a contradiction between what the mothers needed and what those administering the fund thought they should have. Under the previous administration by the Social Fund, mothers would be given cash through both the CCG and CL, arguably giving them greater choice in what they wanted. The other key source of financial support for mothers were BLs. These loans are most likely to be taken up by low-income women (DWP, 2011). While BLs existed prior to austerity and welfare reform– they are arguably more relevant now because the reductions in support through social security will mean mothers need greater access to this type of additional support.

This research has demonstrated the importance of using intersectionality to understand how these reductions have affected young lone mothers. It is clear that having different social statuses gives them access to variety of appropriate support. However, by exploring the mothers' experiences of services during a period of austerity and welfare reform, the findings suggest there has been a reduction or removal in the types of support available to them. This gives a broad understanding of how their lives have been affected not only by the loss of the TPS, but other services that they may draw on; particularly financial support based on their social class status. Chapters Five, Six and Seven have focused on providing an analysis of the main findings as reported by the participants in this research. The final chapter will bring the main findings together and set them within the context of current policy and other literature. This final chapter will also be an opportunity for me to summarise how the thesis engaged with my research questions.

Chapter Eight

Young Lone Motherhood in an Era of Austerity and Welfare Reform

8.1 Introduction

In the previous three chapters (Five, Six and Seven) I provided an analysis of the data from the interviews conducted with participants, and set out the main empirical findings from this research. The discussions with young mothers produced a number of significant findings regarding their lives within a context of austerity and welfare reform, and how they managed the stigma and prejudice associated with their position as young lone mothers. The discussions with practitioners shed considerable light on local experiences and contexts of austerity in relation to service provisions for young mothers, and enabled me to understand the extent to which this group of women have been affected. Taking an intersectional approach, the analysis suggests that age, gender, lone motherhood and social class interact and reinforce experiences of disadvantage and the impact of policy change.

The purpose of this final chapter is to discuss the main findings of this research, reflecting on the research questions of my thesis. This chapter will also focus on five key policy recommendations that flow from my analysis that point to ways that might improve the experiences of young lone mothers, giving them access to more opportunities and better life chances. Following this, I will consider how my research contributes to social policy discussions, and also reflect on the scope for future research. The final section in this chapter will provide an overarching conclusion to the thesis.

8.2 Addressing my Research Questions: Discussion of Key Findings

When starting out this research, I proposed the following four questions:

1. How has austerity since 2010 affected young lone mothers in the UK?

2. How are young lone mothers coping with the challenges of the resulting period of welfare reform?
3. How do age, gender, lone motherhood and class intersect to create unique experiences of discrimination, stigma and disadvantage for lone mothers?
4. What formal and informal forms of financial and non-financial support are young lone mothers drawing on in times of financial hardship?

In this section, I will discuss the main findings of my research in light of these questions. In the first part I will consider how austerity has impacted the lives of young lone mothers, especially through reductions in service provision. I will then consider the implications of welfare reform, while in the final part of this section, I will consider young lone motherhood, stigma and identity.

8.2.1 Young Lone Mothers and the Impact of Austerity

Young lone mothers are highly dependent on non-financial support services delivered at a local level. They draw on children's centres, housing and education services targeted at young mothers. Under the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (TPS), launched in 1999, a wide variety of services were created for young mothers based on their age. Following the 10-year period of expansion in services for young mothers, the formation of a Coalition Government and the imposition of austerity policies heralded a period of significant contraction in services and support. The resulting austerity agenda was enforced by central government policy, first by the Coalition Government between 2010 and 2015 and then by subsequent Conservative Governments. This agenda has had a direct impact upon local councils which have seen their budgets reduced by almost a quarter since 2010. This, coupled with the withdrawal of the TPS, has meant young motherhood is no longer a policy priority, and services targeted at them have been reduced and withdrawn. The removal of funding for the TPS has not yet been explored at a local level but findings from this research suggest the loss of funding is leading to reductions in local service provision for young mothers and their children. In what follows, I will consider how young lone mothers utilise education,

housing, children centes and the associated support that comes with these. I will then consider how they have been reduced as a consequence of austerity.

Education

In one area where I conducted much of my research, there had previously been a college exclusively for young mothers. The college provided on-site childcare and transport to reduce the barriers young mothers experienced, and allowed them to pursue their educational goals. However, this college was closed as a consequence of reduced council budgets (as well as an apparent reduction in need due to the falling teenage pregnancy rate[150]). Therefore, young mothers currently have significantly less access to targeted education support and an institution that purposely catered for their needs. Research suggests that young mothers experience a number of barriers to education; particularly stigma and childcare (Lall, 2007; Evans, 2009). My research found the latter to be the most problematic. Therefore, targeted support that reduced these barriers is likely to produce positive outcomes for this group of women. Indeed, participants who had used the college when it was open, reported positive outcomes such as being able to go to university and the opportunity to pass GCSEs that enabled to undertake further study. Mothers who had missed out on the opportunity to attend the college expressed disappointment as they favoured targeted support that they felt better met their needs. The closure of the college also has longer-term implications for this group of women. The college offered mothers the opportunity to just study the GCSEs that they had missed out on at school. This allowed them to study part time while also carrying out childcare responsibilities. However, as explained by the education practitioners and explored in Chapter Seven, there is now no educational provision for young mothers that offers the same opportunities. Young mothers wanting to study for their GCSEs at college now have to complement this with another course. This means they have to commit more hours to

[150] This was reported by practitioners – although they disputed the level of need had reduced as not all local young mothers accessed the college when it was open therefore the falling pregnancy rate could not be associated with the number of young mothers who wanted to access the college.

study, requiring them to find alternative provision for their children for more hours every week. The study-childcare balance is thus jeopardized and consequently, mothers face greater barriers in accessing education. This has implications for future study and employment opportunities. Research has already established young mothers are significantly less likely to attend university than their childless peers (Action for Children, 2017). Furthermore, qualifications lone mothers hold are important in gaining and maintaining paid work (Rabindrakumar, 2018). Therefore, the closure of this collage is likely to have long lasting impacts (both in regards to higher education and employment) for mothers who would have otherwise benefited from this opportunity.

My research suggests young mothers are unlikely to leave school with qualifications meaning they are already disadvantaged young people. Some of the participants in this research reported they had gained qualifications after becoming a mother but many did not have any qualifications. This highlights the importance of studying and passing GCSEs as a pathway for young lone mothers to access more secure and better paid employment opportunities. This study supports an already existing body of evidence that has established education is something many young mothers want to pursue (Duncan, 2007). However this research expands on this by taking an intersectional approach to understanding the challenges experienced by young lone mothers pursuing these opportunities. They face additional disadvantages compared to other young people because they have children to care for and often have unstable housing situations and responsibilities of managing household budgets. As lone mothers, they have limited support from the child's father meaning they have to manage everything on their own. While many lone mothers may want to engage in education, the difference for young mothers is that their education is more likely to have been interrupted by pregnancy or the birth of their child meaning they could often not finish compulsory school or college (Dench et al., 2007). Despite not attaining qualifications while at school, this study found that having a child often encouraged mothers to pursue their education with them wanting qualifications and careers. The intersections of their various statuses mean however that young mothers find it much harder to access education. Changes in provision for these young women

mean accessing education is much more difficult for them and this will have long term consequences in terms of paid work and their ability to escape poverty.

This research has also linked the loss of education provision to the removal of the TPS as a consequence of austerity. Under the TPS, education was seen as a key component for young mothers and their children with policy makers keen to ensure these young women gain qualifications – leading to more employment opportunities and a reduction in social exclusion. The education college considered within this research is an example of the expansion of services under the TPS. However, the withdrawal of the TPS and the associated funding means policy makers are no longer concerned with the educational needs of young mothers. Therefore, this research concludes austerity has contributed to preventing young mothers accessing qualifications and training.

Housing

Despite housing being a key component of the TPS, up until now, very few studies been done to explore the housing journeys of young mothers. Although an evaluation by Johnson and Quiligars (2010) looked at some of the outcomes of mothers and their children who had been in mother and baby accommodation and Bailey at al. (2002) looked at the experiences of mothers in temporary accommodation - these did not capture the complex housing journeys of this group of women. Therefore, this research contributes to our understanding of the challenges young mother face around different forms of accommodation and the challenges of finding a permanent home. Using an intersectional approach, my research found that housing journeys for young lone mothers are complicated with most mothers having to move several times during pregnancy and after the birth of their child. As a consequence of their age, young mothers are less likely to be established in the housing market before their child is born and due to their weak financial standing they are unable to engage as consumers within the housing market. Furthermore, as lone mothers they are solely responsible for ensuring their children have access to appropriate housing, and so cannot simply sofa surf as they might be able to do if they were childless for example.

The intersection between age, social class and lone motherhood means these women are heavily dependent on the state or family to meet their housing needs. Some of the mothers who participated in my research were living at home with their parents and while this helped them financially, it often brought other challenges such as tension and conflict over how the young mothers cared for their child. Furthermore, mothers who had younger siblings had to continue caring for them as well as their own child. Mothers who are homeless while pregnant, as many were in my research, are often placed in hostels which my respondents claimed were unsuitable for their needs. This research and a previous study (Cooke and Owen, 2006) has identified hostels to be unsuitable for pregnant women[151]. Hostels are only considered 'appropriate' accommodation for pregnant women up until the seventh month of pregnancy (Cirone and Casey,2017). However, the findings from this research suggests many mothers were forced to remain in hostels right up until they gave birth. This raises questions regarding whether policy around hostels is being used appropriately when decisions are made regarding housing pregnant young women.

Temporary mother and baby accommodation is important for young mothers as it provides them a place to stay and, as the mothers in this research argued, is an important step to securing their own permanent social home. Despite the importance of temporary mother and baby accommodation for young lone mothers, my research found it was undergoing restructuring as a consequence of austerity and reduced council budgets (linked to the withdrawal of the TPS). The temporary housing that had previously been targeted at lone mothers aged between 16 and 25 was now being allocated to all lone mothers in need regardless of their age. Despite the need to target a wider service user group, the housing charities and associations are not being given any additional funding meaning they cannot provide additional premises or support. While many older lone mothers will benefit from this, young mothers will have to wait longer to access this type of accommodation. This is despite the number of young mothers waiting for mother and baby accommodation increasing. The

[151] As explored in Chapter Six, the mothers reported witnessing drug taking, violence and other behaviours which frightened them.

redesign of these services takes little account of the complex housing needs of young mothers and the difficulties they face because of their age and their financial position in securing their own home. Furthermore, the restructuring of temporary accommodation for young mothers and the subsequent delays they are likely to face in accessing it will extend their housing journeys. As this is a recent development in terms of localised provision, no existing research has explored the consequences for them. This project was completed just prior to these changes taking place meaning there was no opportunity to explore the impact. However, the discovery of the restructuring combined with the findings regarding the complexity of housing journeys reported by mothers acts as a foundation for future research in this area.

Previous research has found lone mothers as a group are more likely to be placed in temporary accommodation than other family types (Oppenheim, 2018). Indeed, the number of lone mothers accessing temporary accommodation increased by 54 per cent between 2013 and 2018 (Shelter, 2018e). However, this thesis has established young lone mothers are likely to be homeless before giving birth, while other research suggests homelessness amongst older lone mothers is more likely to be related to welfare reform. For example, according to Garvie (2018), changes in social security since 2012 including the benefit cap and reductions to the local housing allowance have mostly affected lone mothers and have contributed to a rising number losing their home. The higher need amongst lone mothers means many of them will be looking to the temporary mother and baby accommodation (previously only available for young mothers) to house them. The increase in the number of homeless lone mothers also emphasises the precarious nature of lone parenthood and their reliance of state related housing support. Changes to housing provision for young mothers mean they are likely to face longer waits to access temporary housing, and by implication more time living in unsuitable accommodation such as hostels. Being in unsuitable accommodation has a number of consequences for young mothers. Firstly, hostels are inhospitable environments for these young pregnant women who are exposed to drug use and intimidation while there. Secondly, spending longer in hostels is likely to increase the time young mothers spend in temporary accommodation before they are offered a permanent home. As explored

in Chapter Six, gaining access to mother and baby accommodation was seen as an important step by participants to securing their own social home. Therefore, delayed access to mother and baby accommodation will mean they have to wait longer for a permanent place to live. This has wider implications for young mothers, making it harder for them and their children to be 'settled' in one place and impeding on their ability to find a children's centre or employment close to their home. These findings can be situated in wider literature which has make links between living in temporary accommodation and poor physical and mental health amongst parents (Credland and Lewis, 2004) and their children (Digby and Fu, 2017).

Their lack of financial resources means young mothers have little choice in deciding where they live. Decisions on accommodation are constrained by local council governance. Being placed in temporary accommodation means young mothers are considered homeless and their local council has a duty to offer them accommodation. However, this comes with conditions and young mothers are required to accept whatever accommodation is on offer. The limited power these women have in determining where they live or what accommodation they accept at least partly explains why being allocated social housing was usually not the end of the young mothers' journey through the housing system. Mothers identified numerous problems with their social home such as lack of space, disrepair issues and wider problems with the environment such as anti-social behaviour. This corresponds to existing literature which has found social housing to be characterised by these issues (see Boomsma et al. 2017 for example). The inadequacy of their social home meant many of the mothers were currently active in trying to move house. This further highlights the precarious nature of housing circumstances for this group of women and their children.

Children's Centres and Wider Support Services

Question four of this research was concerned with services mothers draw on in times of hardship. Discussions with participants found they utilised a number of formal non-financial services to meet their needs. This support comes from a variety of sources

including practitioners associated with their housing, practitioners who support education, and those working at children's centres. Mothers preferred to use services that targeted young mothers as they felt these were best suited for their needs and came without stigma and prejudice.

Previous research has found targeted support to be beneficial for young mothers (Woodward et al. 2017). Other existing literature has also documented the withdrawal of children's centres (Powell, 2019) and other services such as domestic violence charities (Towers and Ealby, 2012). However, understating how young lone mothers have been directly affected by service withdrawal (including those targeted at them) has not been previously explored. My research found that this support has been diminished for this group of women as a consequence of austerity and reduced council budgets. A number of organisations I contacted who had previously provided support for young mothers, had already withdraw their services due to austerity related reductions in funding. The organisations that were still in place had also seen their funding reduced or the conditions of their funding changed. The education college for young mothers was closed, housing now needed to be targeted at all lone mothers (rather than those aged 16-25) and children's centre groups for young mothers were being withdrawn or seeing their services reduced.

Despite having health visitors and in some cases social workers, young mothers did not utilise these services often. This is because they tended to feel stigmatised by these professionals and were concerned about disclosing information that may lead to their children being taken away from them. These women are justified to feel concerned about these services as existing literature suggests stigma towards them exists amongst professionals including social workers (Rutman et al, 2002) and medical practitioners (Fessler, 2008). Young mothers in this research also reported they actively avoided generalist services such as children's centres because they feared stigma from older mothers. Instead, they utilised groups for young mothers, provided by a small number of children's centres. Young mothers feel segregated from older mothers because of age differences, and segregated from other young people because they are parenting. Therefore, they sought companionship with other

young mothers whom they felt had more in common with them. Groups for young mothers acted as an important place for young mothers to make contact with each other, and participants identified developing friendship networks as a reason for attending these groups. This contradicts previous research which has found young mothers avoid befriending other young mothers (Ellis-Sloan and Tamplin, 2019). Instead, young mothers value their friendships with other young mothers and use them as an extended network of informal emotional and social support.

Attendance at children's centres also gave young mothers the opportunity to have a break from the demands of childcare. Young mothers have little disposable income, preventing them from accessing activities. However, children's centres offer free space for mothers to attend with their children. At one group where I conducted fieldwork, young mothers were offered the opportunity to do a short education course. Therefore, these centres also act as places of learning for young lone mothers and are an opportunity for them to gain qualifications. Furthermore, they often also provide sexual health advice and provide free contraception. This holistic approach to supporting young mothers ensures they get access to various services in the same place. The unique intersections of their various statuses mean young mothers' value targeted support that is free and aimed at them as a group. Thus, reductions in these groups have wide implications for young mothers: it prevents them from forming friendships, having a free place to go, developing their skills and accessing free health (including sexual health) advice.

Exploring localised service provision – and reductions in this provision - has enabled this research to contribute to how a particular group – young lone mothers – have been affected. At one children's centre group where I conducted fieldwork, they had experienced a number of austerity related funding reductions, meaning they had been forced to offer less provision including support with cooking and trips. Another centre that offered GCSE courses, where one participant previously attended, had closed completely.

As explored in the Chapter Seven, housing support workers take on a variety of tasks such as completing benefit applications and signposting to other organisations that can offer additional support. However, as these services are now aimed at all lone mothers (rather than targeted at those aged between 16 and 25), it means fewer young lone mothers will benefit from this support. Education providers also go beyond advising on courses and college entry providing parenting classes, taking young women to sexual health clinics, identifying sexual grooming and helping them build their confidence. While existing research and policy documents have established the types of services available to young mothers (see Johnson and Quilligars, 2011; PHE, 2017 example), none of these have explored the additional responsibilities practitioners who support young mothers often take on. This research found with overall reductions in service provision, practitioners supporting young mothers have been forced to take on greater responsibility and diversity within the services they provide. While undertaking duties such as taking young mothers to sexual health clinics and protecting them from sexual exploitation, practitioners are going beyond the services they are commissioned to provide. However, as practitioners explained, all of these tasks are key to ensure the well-being and safety of mothers and their children. If services continue to be reduced for young mothers, they will not only lose housing and education related support but also important areas of support such as personal safety and protection. Even after moving on from the support provided by practitioners, many mothers tended to stay in contact with them. My research showed that the same practitioners continued to provide young lone mothers with guidance on other issues. However, the reduction of these services as a consequence of austerity has begun to limit the networks of support for young mothers or has made them harder to access. These changes will of course not just impact on my research participants. Many girls who will become young mothers in the future will also have to face a situation where there are limited networks of support for them. As there has been no previous study which has looked at the wide implications of these local reductions – it is unlikely local policy makers are aware just how much this group of women will be affected. The findings from this thesis should therefore raise concerns for local authorities. While councils may believe they are simply withdrawing education and housing related support, the implications of such withdrawals are

actually much wider. Furthermore, as young mothers actively avoid more generalist support services, their needs are unlikely to be addressed through any other means.

8.2.2 The Challenges of Welfare Reform

My research took place during a period of massive reductions in and restructuring of welfare reform. Welfare reform is in itself, a separate issue to austerity although as this thesis has shown, reducing state spending has resulted in the cutting of social security provision. The purpose of question two in this thesis was to understand how welfare reform had impacted on my research participants. In Chapter Three, I explored how certain groups (women, young people, lone mothers and those in need of state support) have been affected by welfare reform. The impact of welfare reform has not been shared equally amongst everyone and this research has found young mothers have been, and will be, affected by welfare reform in a number of ways based on their various social statuses. As their statuses intersect, this creates a unique social position for these young women, characterised by disadvantage.
In this section, I will consider the implications of universal credit, young mothers' dependence on formal financial networks of support (and the changes in these services), and their perceptions of child maintenance and the Child Maintenance Service (CMS).

Universal Credit

The implications of welfare reform for young lone mothers were the focus of my second question. Chapter Three sets out, in detail, the main changes that have affected low-income families with children. As young mothers have been bringing their children up in the context of these reductions, they were not able to comment on what life was like before for them. However, they were able to talk about ongoing and incoming challenges they experience, particularly the introduction of universal credit (UC).

Mothers who were already claiming UC raised concerns about the bureaucratic process of claiming, and the difficulties in getting the money they were entitled to. Mothers who were claiming income support (IS) were aware of UC and had a number of concerns about this new benefit. The first concern was regarding the monthly payments that make budgeting more difficult. For young mothers, having weekly tax credit payments and fortnightly IS payments gave them a sense of financial security because if money was used on living costs, they do not need to wait as long until their next payment. This corresponds with existing literature which suggests those on low incomes find it easier to budget small, regular payments (Harris et al. 2009). Mothers also raised concerns about having to pay landlords directly and felt they would struggle to do this because of the complexities of budgeting and organising their money each month.

As only a small number of women in this research were in receipt of UC, it is difficult to draw any significant conclusions. However, this research does contribute to our wider understanding of the potential implications of UC as it has taken an intersectional approach to consider its impact. Findings from this research suggest the intersections between age, gender, lone motherhood and social class will all influence young mothers' experience of UC. Mothers were not aware of some of the ways that UC would differ from IS such as the reduced individual element due to their age, and the greater conditionality concerning working hours. However, both of these have implications for this group of women. As young mothers are often materially deprived before becoming pregnant, they are consequently more likely to need access to social security benefits to support their children (LGA, 2018). Women, who earn less over the life course compared to men, are also more likely to need greater access to these benefits for longer periods (De Henau, 2017). Lone mothers, as a group, are affected far more by the introduction of UC than couples with children (Tucker, 2017). However, young lone mothers are affected to greater extent because of the individual element of UC becoming conditional on their age. As mothers will receive less money under UC than under IS until they are 25, this will reduce their income by almost £800 a year (Gingerbread, 2013). As my research has established, young lone mothers are

already struggling with their limited income and this further reduction is likely to cause additional financial hardships.

The current higher rate of income support, job seekers allowance, and employment and support allowance paid to lone mothers once they reach 18 is significant because it acts as recognition of their parenting responsibilities and some additional costs that come with this. However, by paying them a lower rate of the individual element of UC, they will get no more than a childless person aged between 16 and 25. From this we can infer that that this policy change recognises my respondents more as young people than as lone mothers. By confining them to receiving a lower rate of UC, policy makers devalue their position as mothers and neglect the additional costs of raising children. While the individual element of UC is meant to pay the living costs of the claimant, my research has found that mothers prioritise the household budget to meet the needs of their children, meaning the mothers themselves will ultimately lose out. This approach to budgeting amongst lone parents is not unusual with children benefiting at the expense of mothers (Lister, 2005). However, it is arguably more significant for young lone mothers when considering the individual element of UC as they will have reduced budgets and therefore will likely have to regularly go without to look after their children. Recently, CPAG (2019b) attempted to file a judicial review on behalf of a young lone mother regarding the lower UC rate linked to her age. This was refused and the CPAG have appealed; as of February 2021, this case is still ongoing.

Policy makers may well assume that young mothers (as young people) can ask their family for additional financial support to make up any shortfalls to compensate for the reduced payment under UC. This was the justification given in 1986 when the rate of pay for work replacement benefits was reduced for young people aged 18-25 without children (Evans et al. 1994). There has been growing 'familialisation' (Millar, 2018, P.40) of policy in the UK since 2010, characterised by the withdrawal of state support through the process of welfare reform with the expectation that young mothers' families will meet the shortfall. As a consequence of this, greater responsibility has been assigned to the family to reduce poverty. However, policy makers do not have

an evidence base which suggests that families can offer financial support to their children when they become parents. Findings from this research show young mothers are seldom supported by their family in this way, and instead are highly dependent on state benefits and other services such as food banks.

The greater conditionality concerning working hours attached to UC also has implications for young women wanting to return to education. The intersection between their age and their position as lone mothers is key to understanding this impact. As explored in the previous section, young mothers value gaining qualifications and most are either in education or want to return to education. However, under UC rules young lone mothers will have to access paid work when their children are younger and additionally, they will be required to work more hours than under the previous IS system. This will make education much harder for young lone mothers to access. As poor women, they need access to UC but the conditionality surrounding this new benefit means young lone mothers will be subject to greater governance by the state concerning if and when they can engage in education. As explored in the previous section, young lone mothers already face significant disadvantages in education. This approach to conditionality is likely to create an additional barrier.

Formal Financial Support Services

Understanding formal financial support services brings together question two and question four of this thesis. Question two is concerned with the implications of welfare reform and question four is concerned with services young mothers draw on in times of hardship. This research found having a network of financial services for mothers was very important because their income was limited and they often struggled to buy basic goods such as food.

As a consequence of growing poverty, families have been forced to seek other forms of support to meet financial shortfalls. The use of these services has been linked to welfare reform and reduced incomes, and families use these services when they

cannot afford to buy food or items such as children's clothing (Loopstra et al. 2018; Aiken et al. 2018). My research found food banks and baby banks are important forms of support for young lone mothers which was associated with the general inadequacy of income received in the form of social security benefits.

The Social Fund (SF) has been targeted as part of the welfare reform agenda and is also something young mothers draw on to help meet the shortfall between social security benefits and buying items for their home and their children. Community Care Grants (CCG) and Crisis Loans (CL), originally part of the SF, were an important source of financial support for those on low incomes. Previous research has suggested that the group most likely to apply for and receive a CCG and a CL were single women (DWP, 2011). Therefore, the SF which has been replaced by Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) schemes are likely to affect this group of women more. Research on LWA schemes is limited (likely because of the local nature of them and difficulty in accessing information held by hundreds of authorities). Previous studies have focused on how the schemes have been withdrawn or reduced (Aitchison, 2018) and whether schemes are delivered in the form of grants or loans (Gibbons, 2015).

However, no study has yet considered the real-life implications of the change from central (through the SF) to local support (through the LWA). The findings of my research suggested LWA schemes are an important form of financial support for young lone mothers, using it to purchase items for their new home. As a consequence of their low income, they cannot afford to buy furniture and appliances. While mothers appreciated having access to local financial support, they also criticised the fact that they were given little choice in terms of what items would be prioritised under these schemes. While non-cash financial support from LWAs is important for supporting young mothers, deciding on what items they can have has removed young mothers' agency and the ability to make their own choices. It suggests local councils believe they know what young mothers need as opposed to the mothers themselves. This causes additional problems for mothers who have to go without items they requested were prioritised.

Budgeting and credit union loans were used to pay for occasions such as children's birthdays, Christmases, or to decorate new homes. These findings demonstrate the complex networks of support; with mothers drawing on multiple formal services to supplement their low income. Without access to these additional sources of support, these mothers would be unable to provide celebratory occasions for their children. My research found that young lone mothers do not use these services in isolation but rather these services form a network of support for them. Most mothers draw on more than one from of support and use them multiple times.

My research also found mothers tended to rely on these formal forms of support rather than informal financial support from their family. While some mothers might go to their families for support, they often have to pay back money. This highlights the importance of these formal services in meeting financial shortfalls for young lone mothers.

Child Maintenance

My research found poverty was part of the lived experience for young lone mothers and child maintenance has been found to be effective at reducing poverty in lone parent families (Hakovirta, 2011). However, only a small number of mothers in my research reported they did receive maintenance. This support was infrequent with their former partner having control over how much was paid and when it was received. This corresponds to existing literature which has also found child related financial support is paid irregularly and usually in small amounts (Bryson et al. 2012).

The majority of participants in this research reported that they were not receiving any maintenance. This supports findings from a previous study which found lone mothers under 25 are the group who are least likely to receive maintenance (Toomse and Maplethorpe, 2010). Thus, it is likely that age is important as a status in receiving this type of financial support. While previous literature has focused on the inadequacy of policy around maintenance (Ridge, 2004) and the reluctance of fathers to pay (Skinner, 2012) – this research has found mothers often make active decisions not to

claim. While survey data has already identified that sometimes lone mothers decide not to request maintenance (Toomse and Maplethorpe, 2010) – this study goes further to explain this reluctance. Most of the mothers who refused to apply for maintenance argued this would give their former partner greater control over them and automatically give him the right to have contact with their child. This was disconcerting to mothers because their former partner had broken off the relationship either while they were pregnant or shortly after giving birth to their child. For them, the father had already made a choice not to be involved and him paying maintenance would pave the way for him to return. Other mothers reported domestic abuse and other behaviours such as drug addiction and violence that they wanted to protect their children from. The explanations add new knowledge to our understanding of the low rates of child maintenance amongst lone mothers.

While young mothers' refusal to claim maintenance could be seen as an act of agency or an individual choice, we must also remember that the current policy puts severe constraints their decisions. Child maintenance policy has changed considerably over the past six years with the replacement of the Child Support Agency (CSA) with the Child Maintenance Service (CMS). The CSA acted as a third party by collecting the maintenance from the non-resident parent and making payments to the parent with care. The CMS encourages separated parents to set up a family-based arrangement[152] and seldom gets involved in transferring payments. When it does get involved, mothers must pay a £20 fee to access the service. A small number of mothers in this research made reference to the £20 application fee and this combined with the limited amount they believed they would receive in maintenance acted as a disincentive to applying. It is difficult to know if having access to the former CSA would increase the likelihood of these young women claiming maintenance, however it is clear that the new CMS system will not increase the number of claims because mothers do not want to make contact with their estranged partner to set up a family-based arrangement. Neither do they want to engage with the CMS. Mothers'

[152] This is when parents decide between them how much maintenance will be paid and how often.

attitudes and experiences regarding child maintenance highlight state failures to make this service accessible and ensure that children receive financial support from their father.

This chapter has so far explored the policy implications for young mothers based on their various social statuses. What is clear about austerity and welfare reform is that young lone mothers have been affected on a number of fronts based on the intersections of their different social statuses. Even before becoming pregnant, they are likely to be materially disadvantaged meaning once they have children, they are more likely to need access to state welfare and support. Being lone mothers, they are the group that has been most affected by austerity and welfare reform. The fathers of their children are seldom involved in caring or providing financial support, meaning the mothers are solely responsible for their children making it difficult for them to manage paid work and care. Similar to other young people they are keen to engage in education, however provision for young mothers has been reduced as a consequence of austerity. Reductions of targeted support in housing and children's centres mean young mothers, as a group, are also being targeted.

8.2.3 An Intersectional Approach to Stigma and Identity Construction

My third question was concerned the intersection of youth, gender, lone motherhood and social class, and how this influenced the experience of stigma for young lone mothers. This section will focus on the role of social statuses and the contribution to identify construction. I will then draw on the main findings regarding how young lone mothers manage their identities as a consequence of this stigma.

Using Goffman's (1990a; 1990b) theory of stigma this research sought to apply his ideas to the experiences of young lone mothers. Findings suggested young lone mothers are subject to three types of stigma: abominations of the body, blemishes of character and tribal. In the context of motherhood, the 'youth' of these women acts as an abomination of the body. Consequently, the age of the mother becomes a focus for stigma. The blemishes of character are linked to the perceived negative character

traits that young mothers hold. The participants in this research identified numerous blemishes of characters; these were particularly concerned with how young mothers were incapable of parenting (because of their age, lone parenthood status and social class). Participants argued that cultural constructions of the 'good' mother (who is in her 30's, married and has money/is working) reinforced these blemishes of character. As young mothers are considered to be a homogenous group (Macvarish and Billings, 2010), tribal stigma is also applied with mothers reporting assumptions and judgements were automatically made about them by various actors including health and social care practitioners, peers and strangers. Goffman also considered courtesy stigma, which was also applied to this research. This research did identify courtesy stigma amongst the (former) friends of young mothers. Participants reported friendships that had been formed prior to their pregnancy often broke down and that these friends even contributed to the stigma they experienced. This is likely to be at least partly linked to courtesy stigma; with young people fearing stigma by association with this marginalised group of women. However, my research did not find courtesy stigma amongst friendships between young lone mothers. This contradicts previous research which has found young mothers tend to stigmatise (Jones et al. 2019) and avoid each other (Ellis-Sloan and Tamplin, 2019). This may be because friendships between young mothers had mostly developed at targeted groups they attended. Thus, it may be that consistently being exposed to each other serves to break down stigma and encourages social and emotional support networks to develop between them.

This research also used intersectionality to develop our understanding of stigma. Previous research with young mothers has focused on their 'youth' as the source of stigma (see Kirkman et al. 2001; Duncan, 2007; Whitley and Kirmayer, 2008). However, my research suggests that that the stigmatising of this group of women is far more complicated; it is created by an intersection of different social statuses. The four statuses identified within this research were all important within the identity construction of my participants. One of the key findings for this research is that gender intersects with both social class and lone parenthood. As young women, their relationships and sexual habits are targeted and scrutinised far more than their male

peers and older women. As a consequence of being female and being young, mothers argued they were targeted by various stakeholders such as the general public and health and social care professionals. By getting pregnant, young mothers make their intimate relationships 'public knowledge' and leave them open to greater scrutiny (Shaw, 2010). Young women who get pregnant are shamed, accused of failing to resist their own sexual desires while young men are seen as acting on natural urges (Hollway, 1994). Pregnancy in older women is seen as socially acceptable because they are assumed to be more economically secure with less reliance on the state (Daguerre and Nativel, 2006). My research found, as a consequence of their stigmatised image, this social acceptance is never afforded to young lone mothers.

Mothers in my research argued claiming benefits and using other welfare networks such as food banks contributed to their experiences of stigma. These ideas of accessing social security and other welfare services are tied to the importance of social class. According to Frampton (2010), middle class and working class young mothers are viewed differently with poorer mothers receiving far more negative attention. My research confirmed this. Most of my respondents came from poor and deprived backgrounds and these conditions continue as they become parents. The mothers in this research are not only young and not following the traditional life course, they are considered 'wrong girls' who are getting pregnant, removing themselves from the labour market, and depending on state support. This perception means young lone mothers are disadvantaged based on their social class as well as their age and gender. As their statuses intersect, they create a unique social position for young lone mothers. They evoke little sympathy, are seen as undeserving of help and support and there is significant pressure concerning gendered expectations in terms of caring for and supporting their children.

Young mothers engaged with a variety of services. Some of these were sought after such as the young mother groups, while others were conditional on support such as the Job Centre. Consequently, the participants in my research spent much of their time in public places, engaging with a variety of audiences. This visibility however means more opportunities for scrutiny. Being 'on show' and aware of the stigma

attached to their status further forces mothers to adopt certain behaviours through performance management to deflect certain undesirable assumptions. This is certainly the case when it comes to buying particular clothes for children to avoid the stigma of poverty. To further prevent stigma before it happened, this research found mothers avoided certain mother and baby groups or services. Mothers identified older mothers as being key actors in stigmatising them and therefore they avoided groups where they would have to interact with them.

Finding themselves segregated from 'normal' discourses around motherhood, they spent their time constructing their own positive identity; described by Kirkman el al. as a 'consoling plot' (2001, P. 291). My research also found evidence of this consoling plot. Mothers talked about the positives of youthful mothering by emphasising the link between youth and good health, as well as highlighting the closeness in age between them as mothers and their young children, which means they might have more in common. Therefore, while participants were aware of external negative perceptions that others had of young lone mothers, they did not agree with them.

My research has also developed our understanding of the construction of this 'consoling plot.' Mothers not only cited positive attributes of young motherhood – they also rejected traditional perceptions of 'good' motherhood as a way to further enhance their status. They argued that society promoted the idea of a 'good' mother who is in her 30s (older than them), married (unlike them), and economically active and financially secure (which they were not). Participants also argued however that while society may promote perceptions of what a 'good' mother should be like, the standards they promote are unachievable. Despite this argument, mothers recognised the constructions of 'good' motherhood were deeply embedded in culture and highly valued by others. Therefore, my research also found they engaged in performance management to deflect or manage stigma in public places and around certain professionals. When in the presence of professionals whom they believed were critical of their status as young and lone mothers, my participants ensured they presented themselves in ways consistent with culturally acceptable forms of good mothering behaviour. Social workers in particular were seen as an audience who

mothers performed to: giving them answers to questions they thought they wanted to hear and withholding information such as domestic abuse. Mothers argued they were also forced to justify their choices in terms of purchases for their children and any additional help they needed such as through the food bank to other people. This finding strengthens previous research by Ellis-Sloan (2014) who also found mothers engaged in performance management. However, Ellis-Sloan also found that young mothers engaged in performance management in front of her. This is not something I found in my research. As explored in Chapter Five, some of the mothers informed me they felt comfortable talking to me – owing to my previous status of a young mother and therefore would be not be judgmental towards them. The personal interviews mothers provided; where they were open about very sensitive topics including poverty, homelessness, domestic violence and experiences of stigma do suggest they felt they were in a safe space with me as the researcher. Additionally, mothers also reported positive experiences with targeted services and practitioners who they felt understood their needs. Practitioners were very active in supporting mothers with a variety of issues including relationships and sexual health; thus, suggesting mothers feel comfortable accessing them for support on deeply personal matters. This contributes to our understanding of the experience of stigma amongst these women; suggesting they don't feel the need to engage in performance management with those who they don't feel stigmatised by.

As a consequence of young lone mothers being so far removed from cultural expectations of 'good' motherhood, a 'spoilt identity' is created. The social world is a hostile environment for young lone mothers and they are intensely governed and scrutinised by professionals. The stigma allocated based on each of their statuses intersects and reinforces the position of these young women. While this research found young mothers are active agents in this process – where they challenge traditional discourses of 'good' motherhood and stress the advantages of being young lone mothers, the choices they make are done within a highly constrained context. This means mothers are ultimately required to contribute a considerable amount of performance management to mitigate against the stigma allocated to them.

8.3 Policy Implications and Recommendations

In this section I will draw on my key findings to reflect upon policy recommendations that might lead to improvements in the lives and outcomes for young lone mothers. After setting out these recommendations I will reflect on the likelihood of these being achieved with the current political context.

- Recommendation One: Make education, training and paid work more accessible for lone mothers up to the age of 25

Having children at a young age acts as a barrier for young lone mothers in terms of education as childcare facilities and educational support are limited. While the Care to Learn Grant (CLG) produces good outcomes in terms of qualifications, there is very little uptake. This is likely to be because young mothers value spending their child's early years caring for them full time and want to return to education once their children start school (Dench et al. 2007; Evans and Slowley, 2010). To increase uptake, the CLG could be extended to 25-year-olds. If the CLG was extended to include young mothers up to 25 who are interested in pursuing education, it could allow them to gain qualifications and increase their opportunities for higher education and paid work. The grant could cover both nursery and after-school care costs. Part of a strategy to improve access to education for young mothers also requires onsite childcare and tailored support and guidance either through specialist institutions or by equipping state colleges.

To allow mothers to engage in education, work related conditionality attached to universal credit also needs to be addressed. Currently young mothers are expected to work for 16 hours a week once their youngest child turns three and 25 hours per week once their youngest child turns five (DWP, 2019a). Consequently, lone mothers will have to combine parenting responsibilities with education in addition to paid work. As paid work is a condition of their benefits, they will have to prioritise this over education. To address this, the Department for Work and Pensions could extend conditionality to include hours in education as paid work. This will enable mothers to

pursue education without having to undertake a set number of hours in paid work as well. This will also likely encourage more lone mothers to engage in education who favour developing their skills for better-paid jobs over entering low paid employment.

- Recommendation Two: Expand childcare provision for young lone mothers up to 25

Accessing childcare and paying for it is particularly difficult for low-income lone mothers who struggle to meet the high costs of childcare and ensure work is financially rewarding (Rabindrakumar, 2015). Current childcare policy as outlined in Chapter Three is not meeting the needs of lone mothers as well as other low-income families. Therefore, more policy development is needed to ensure lone parents have access to childcare. According to Corry (2017), current government policy does not address affordability or the supply of childcare. Research suggests high childcare costs deter mothers from working (Huskinson et al 2016) and there is currently a shortage of places for children (Harding and Cottell, 2018). The lack of places is a consequence of inadequate government funding with many nurseries refusing to provide state funded places because funding falls 20 per cent below the cost of running the service (Ferguson, 2017). Therefore, the Government needs to address support for this group for women by developing policy where childcare provision is adequately funded to enable lone parents to engage in paid work.

Extending childcare ties in with recommendation one and will support mothers while they are in education, training or paid work. However, childcare should be accessible for these women even if they are not at college or in the labour market. Childcare policy is closely tied to paid work in the UK with little consideration given to the well-being of young mothers. The financial constraints experienced by the participants in my research meant they could not often afford to take their children out to engage in other activities. Furthermore, as young people they are segregated from doing activities with their friends because of their childcare responsibilities. Therefore, providing childcare could enhance the lives of mothers and their children by allowing

mothers to have time to themselves and providing their children with a diverse range of activities.

- Recommendation Three: Increase the universal credit individual element to the same rate for lone mothers under 25

Young mothers are being treated more as 'young people' within UC rules while their responsibilities of mothers with care are neglected. Growing policy focus on 'familialisation' means governments are attempting to get the wider family of young mothers to support them and take on responsibilities previously performed by the state. However, young mothers do not often draw on their family for financial support as in most cases parents cannot afford to support them. Furthermore, any money from family members was usually a loan and they were required to pay it back.

Young mothers are an already disadvantaged group and as my research has shown, most have to depend on additional sources of formal financial support such as budgeting loans to meet shortfalls in their income. The difference of almost £800 a year in UC payments for them as a consequence of their age (Gingerbread, 2013) will lead to greater hardships for both them and their children. By mirroring the current rules of income support, where lone mothers can claim a higher rate once they turn 18, will at least keep their payments at the same level as older lone mothers and reflect that they are young women with caring responsibilities rather than just 'young women.'

- Recommendation Four: Restore funding for local services for young lone mothers with a focus on housing, education and health related services. Develop all of these services to target young mothers up to the age of 25

There were two clear findings from local service provisions for young lone mothers. The first is that young mothers prefer targeted services so that they can interact with other young mothers and are supported by practitioners who understood their needs.

The second is that core services have been subject to funding reductions and by implication, service provision reductions.

In terms of non-financial services, young lone mothers are more likely to draw on targeted services based on their age. Research suggests services that understand the needs of young mothers and provide support without stigma are more likely to result in successful interventions (Mills et al. 2012). As participating in services is often challenging for young mothers, positive experiences could help them engage better. As demonstrated in my research, young mothers do not like generalist services and do not want to be mixed with older mothers whom they feel they have little in common with. Furthermore, my research also found that young mothers often lose their pre-pregnancy friendship networks when they become mothers and additionally, want to be around other young mothers who they believe can relate better with them. Services targeted at young mothers are important in generating and sustaining friendship networks. Therefore, the need to develop and maintain targeted services for young mothers is very important.

As much of the funding for the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy was withdrawn in 2011, local councils have limited resources to fund services for young mothers. To address this, central government needs to provide ring-fenced resources to support young lone mothers. This will increase service provision and ensure that all young lone mothers' needs are met in areas such as housing and education. Service provision should also be extended to include mothers up to age 25 so that women in their twenties will also benefit. As my research has shown, young mothers often think about returning to education once their children are in school (and they are likely to be in their twenties) meaning this support could help them. Furthermore, my research has shown that the housing problems faced by this group of women are usually long term with many spending years in insecure and unsuitable accommodation. Providing dedicated housing support will improve their situation and this is even more important at a time where the number of young mothers who have high housing needs is increasing.

- Recommendation Five: Re-design Local Welfare Assistance schemes and ensure they are funded to meet the needs of local residents

While Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) schemes provide an essential source of financial support for young lone mothers as well as other low-income groups, their 'patchwork' coverage means accessibility is very much dependent on where people live. Gibbons (2015) conducted a review of local schemes and found wide variations between the types of support offered. There were differences for example in how the support was delivered with some councils doing it via grants and others through loans; differences in the criteria set to enable people to access support from the scheme; as well as differences in the number of times a household can apply. Thus, where young lone mothers live is likely to affect the type of service they receive and indeed, if there is any support available at all.

My research has shown how important formal financial sources of support are for young lone mothers. They provide essential provision for young mothers to allow them to give their children a 'good Christmas' and birthday while also supporting mothers in emergencies such as by providing supermarket vouchers for food and top-ups for their prepayment utilities. Therefore, policy makers at both local and national levels need to ensure welfare assistance is available for all young lone mothers who need it. Prior to the creation of LWAs, provision was made by the Social Fund through Community Care Grants (CCG) that were given as cash to allow applicants to purchase furniture, pay for rent in advance, and other expenses such as urgent travel. Unlike the LWA schemes, the Social Fund operates at a national level through the Department for Work and Pensions meaning all citizens are treated in a similar way. Therefore, LWAs need to be reformed and provided with guidance to ensure they allocate support in the same way the Social Fund did with CCGs. By doing so, this invaluable support will be accessible for all young lone mothers. In conjunction with this – these LWAs need to be adequately funded. Council budgets were, on average, almost 24 per cent smaller in 2017 compared to 2010 (Gray and Barford, 2018). As a result, many have not been able to afford to keep these schemes running. To ensure full coverage for LWAs, central government funding must be restored.

- Recommendation Six: Reduce the Stigma experienced by Young Lone Mothers with a focus on the current Social Security System

The experience of stigma amongst young mothers was already well established before my research (see Kelly, 1996; Kirkman et al. 2001; Anwar and Stainstreet, 2015; Wenham, 2016 for example). Findings from my study further enforce the experience of stigma amongst young mothers and also suggests stigma is not just allocated on the basis of age but also on other statuses. The intersection between the statuses of young lone mothers creates a stigmatised, devalued social identity for them and influences many of their interactions with others. While participants in this study rejected much of the stigma attached to social positions, they were forced to endure negative experiences from a variety of social actors including the general public and professionals such as nurses and social workers. Therefore, the final policy recommendation is concerned with addressing stigma amongst young lone mothers.

Negative attitudes towards young mothers are deeply imbedded into cultural attitudes and are persistent amongst social institutions. Therefore, addressing and eliminating stigma is likely to be a lengthy process. However, one potential starting point could be to target stigma on the basis of access to social security benefits and other welfare related support. Most of the young women in this research reported experiences of poverty and were forced to endure stigma based on their financial circumstances. The work of Ruth Lister (2004b; 2005; 2006) has been very prominent in exploring the impact of poverty related stigma, arguing this is often internalised by those experiencing poverty, eventually leading to shame. Social security benefits should help mitigate against the stigma of poverty because they ensure families have some form of income to meet their needs and allow them to participate in society. However, stigma attached to social security itself has become prominent in the UK and this has been made worse as a consequence of austerity and welfare reform (Baumberg, 2016; Jensen and Tyler, 2015; Patrick, 2017; Tyler, 2020). The participants in this research also reported welfare-based stigma. A common suggestion to address benefit stigma is to make more benefits contributory or universal because these are less stigmatised forms of support than means tested benefits (Bell, 2013). However,

making benefits universal[153] is unlikely to be a solution for the stigma experienced by young lone mothers. One of the stereotypes attached to youthful motherhood is that they have children just to access monetary and housing resources (Wallbank, 2001). Consequently, having access to universal benefits – especially those associated with having children - is likely to further reinforce this stigma. An alternative approach could be to reduce the conditions attached to benefits such as removing the expected behaviours that would otherwise lead to sanctions and place greater value on unpaid care. There are strict working requirements for lone mothers claiming both IS and UC. When they fail to adhere to these requirements, they are subject to sanctions. Jun (2019) argues the current social security system which focusses on forcing lone mothers into work and punishing them if they resist has further increased the stigma attached to their position. Policy makers should therefore remove conditionality and instead promote the value of the unpaid care done by these women. This could then reduce the stigma of being out of paid work and claiming benefits.

This section has considered six key policy recommendations based on the findings of this research which have been designed with the intention to improve the lives of young mothers and their children by giving them better access to enhanced and stigma- free state support as well as allowing them more opportunities to further their education. Despite the potential to have positive impacts on the lives of these young women, it is unlikely that any of these recommendations can be achieved in the current policy and economic context.

To begin with there are wider challenges to achieving these recommendations. The European Union Referendum in 2016 which resulted in the UK public choosing to leave the EU has dominated policy discussion (Dunlop et al. 2019). With the final outcome in terms of the UK's political and economic relationship with the EU and the rest of the world still unclear; in addition to the uncertainly of how Brexit will impact on communities, means this is likely to be a long-drawn-out policy issue. Furthermore,

[153] Contributory benefits would not be suitable for this group due to their age and them not having built up a contribution record.

the recent Covid-19 pandemic is, as the government have stated themselves, currently where their attention and resources are focused (National Audit Office, 2020). The impact of Covid-19 and Brexit are therefore likely to be at the forefront of the policy agenda in the coming months and possibly years.

The other barrier to achieving these recommendations is the lack of recognition of the needs of young mothers by policy makers. As explored within this thesis, while teenage motherhood was firmly on the policy agenda between 1999 and 2010 through the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, this has since ceased which has resulted in a reduction in funding for services (such as homelessness accommodation and groups for young mothers). Therefore, bringing the needs of young mothers to the attention of policy makers is likely to be challenging. Part of the issue of the TPS was the focus on reducing conceptions amongst teenagers with far less emphasis on supporting young women who became mothers. Consequently, as the teenage conception rate is seen to be somewhat addressed, young mothers are not a group policy makers are currently concerned with. Furthermore, the austerity agenda since 2010 has resulted in a reduction in support services directed at young mothers in addition to welfare reform which has served to reduce the income of families headed by these women. Despite being severely impacted by these changes, young mothers are 'invisible' to policy makers meaning they are unlikely to recognise the challenges and disadvantages young mothers face.

A final point to consider is while young mothers are 'invisible' to policy makers – those who access social security benefits are not. Benefit claimants (particularly those not engaged in paid work) are assumed to be a homogenous group with stigma around their position applied to everyone in this group with little recognition of their different circumstances.[154] Policy makers have been active in stigmatising benefit claimants to enable them to justify austerity and welfare reform (Tyler, 2020). According to Jensen and Tyler (2015) since 2010 politicians have attempted to

[154] This may include people with disabilities and long-term health problems who are unable to engage work, those affected by the insecure labour market and those engaged in unpaid work such as childcare.

promote negative images of welfare as a means to justify retrenchment; a process they refer to as 'weaponising' (P.478) Using the example of the Benefit Cap[155] introduced in 2013 the researchers argue support to limit social security for families was justified by politicians through the example of Michael and Mairead Philpott.[156] This justification was reinforced through media articles which made persistent links between deviant behaviour and benefit receipt; furthering welfare related stigma[157]. Therefore, as arguably policy makers are at the forefront of producing stigma to justify welfare retrenchment, it seems unlikely they will reform the system.

Thus, as a consequence of the reasons set out in this section, policy aimed at addressing the needs of these young women is unlikely to be formulated in the current context.

8.4 Reflections on Thesis and Contributions of Research

In this section, I will start by reflecting on my thesis and consider the wider contributions it makes to social policy and empirical research with disadvantaged groups. I will then reflect on my own position as a former young lone mother and consider how my own experiences differed from the women in this research.

This research has drawn on rich empirical data through the use of semi-structured interviews and focus groups to explore the lived experiences of a disadvantaged group of women. Through collecting primary data this research was able to understand the perspectives from the group who were the focus for this study.

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[155] The Benefit Cap is the maximum amount most families can receive in benefits; this policy is discussed in section 3.2.2.

[156] Michael 'Mick' and Mairead Philpot were found guilty of manslaughter in April 2013. They had set fire to their house along with friend Paul Mosley in an attempt to frame Michael's estranged girlfriend and gain custody of their children. However, the fire quickly spread and resulted in the death of the six children Michael and Mairead shared who were sleeping in the house at the time (Dodd and Laville, 2013).

[157] It should be noted that other news articles condemned this approach to weaponing this crime (see Jones, 2014 for example).

According to Guetzkow et al. (2004) originality in data allows us to produce more knowledge on understudied groups and generate new knowledge about their lives. The originality of data has enabled me to increase our understanding of the lived experiences of young lone mothers both concerning stigma and their living standards; particularly around finances, housing and education. The data has also contributed new knowledge regarding young lone mothers' lived experiences in a climate of austerity and welfare reform which has not yet been explored.

Most research looking at the lived experiences of young mothers has focused on those who are under 20 – often referred to as 'teenage mothers' (see McDermott and Graham, 2005; Duncan, 2007; Anwar and Stanistreet, 2015 for example.) However, my research has framed youthful motherhood differently with empirical data collected from mothers aged between 16 and 25. This approach has extended our understanding of the lives of this group of women in three district ways. The first is the disadvantages that have been previously reported in research looking at teenage mothers have also been found in mothers who are between 20 and 25. Secondly, the vast majority of research with teenage mothers has only explored their lived experiences as 'teenagers' (see Alexander et al. 2010; Middleton, 2011 for example) without considering what happens after their 20th birthday. Some of the mothers in my research had given birth to their first child before the age of 20 but I interviewed them when they were in their early 20's. This gave me a unique insight into their experiences of mothering over a period of time. Responses from these mothers suggested that the experiences such as stigma, poverty, lack of opportunities in education and paid work and difficulties with housing are chronic and persist as they get older. The final contribution in regards to age is concerned with localised support targeted at young mothers. While the expansion of services such as education, housing and children's centre under the TPS were targeted at teenage parents – some local services have supported mothers into their 20's. This was the case with the education, housing and children centre services which had supported or were supporting the majority of mothers in this research. Interviews with mothers suggested these services were highly valued and disappointment was reported amongst those who had been affected by the withdrawal of them. Interviews with

local partitioners confirmed these services were being reduced as a consequence of local spending reductions. This means that mothers up to age 25 are being impacted by the restructuring and retraction of services as a consequence of austerity. The findings from this research combined with wider policy changes (such as the lower rate of UC paid to lone mothers under 25 and the Living Wage only available when young people reach 25) has implications for future research with young mothers. Interested stakeholders should seek to focus on youthful motherhood as a concept which extends in to women's 20's; rather than just considering their teenage years.

As explored in Chapter Four, using intersectionality as a methodology is open to much scrutiny amongst feminists and there is no agreed approach on how it might be used. There is also much disagreement amongst feminists with regards to whether we should consider the disadvantage attached to each status individually or collectively, the latter allowing for greater emphasis on intersectionality. I would argue the findings from my research suggest both understanding stigma separately and collectively are effective approaches for understanding young lone motherhood. In terms of exploring stigma, mothers identified a number of sources linked with each of their individual social statuses. Deconstructing youthful motherhood in this way suggests that the stigma assigned to them by others is not just based on their age but is also influenced by gender, class, and their position as lone mothers. Research looking at youthful motherhood and stigma has generally focused in on their age and neglected how their other social statues might contribute in additional and unique ways. Therefore, when conducting research with young mothers, we cannot assume the stigma is solely attributed their youth. From the perspective of young mothers, it is far more complicated and they feel targeted based on each of these statuses.

Traditionally, research with young mothers has explored the implications for their age, however their other social statuses make their position much more complicated than simply being 'young' mothers. Using intersectionality allowed me to understand how social statuses intersect in unique ways, leading to specific experiences reported by my research participants. Intersectionality has long been established as important for understanding inequality, disadvantage and oppression (Lorde, 1984; Collins,

1986; Crenshaw, 1989; 2000; Bowleg, 2008). However, it is relatively new approach within policy-based research, having only started to gain prominence around a decade ago (Hankivsky and Cormier, 2011). Very little research has been done using intersectionality as an empirical method when looking at social policy. The findings from this research demonstrate the value and importance of using it as an approach to understand how disadvantaged groups are impacted by the types of support and services available to them. I used intersectionality to consider how the intersection of youth, gender, lone motherhood and social class created unique experiences for these women within the context of austerity and welfare reform. My research has demonstrated that young lone mothers have been affected by austerity and welfare reform in distinct, even unique, ways and that all of their social statuses contributed to this. An intersectional analysis demonstrated that district statuses - being poor, young and a parent makes these women very vulnerable to changes in policy. Further analysis found these statuses intersect to create sources of disadvantage in various areas of their lives. However, those in government have failed to consider how all of these changes, targeted at different social groups, accumulate to have a greater impact on citizens. For example, when considering homelessness amongst lone mothers, it is important to recognise their social class (meaning they are restricted in their housing choices because of their income) and age (because as young people they are less likely to be established in the housing market). My findings therefore illustrate the importance of using intersectionality as an empirical approach in social policy research. By doing so, researchers can increase their understanding of the cumulative effects of certain policies on different groups of people.

Furthermore, the use of intersectionality has highlighted the limitations of allocating support and applying conditionality to people on single social characteristics. This research has found this to be particularly problematic in the case of social security benefits and education. As a lower rate of the individual element of UC is paid to women under 25, this means their status as a lone mother with children to take care of has been neglected. Regarding the work conditionality attached to UC, little consideration has been given to these young women engaging in education. Once their child turns three, they are required to be working for 16 hours per week; once

their child is five; the requirement increases to 25 hours per week (DWP, 2019a). This approach neglects the 'youth' of mothers and fails to recognise that as young people, they may want to engage in education rather than the labour market. This approach to UC also fails to take social class and the experience of poverty into consideration as young mothers will likely be dependent on the social security support they receive. Therefore, mothers face a difficult choice when deciding between education and possible sanctions if they fail to fulfil the work conditionally attached to UC. This has implications for future research and policy concerned with young lone mothers. The complexity of these women's lives means welfare cannot simply be allocated to them based on single characteristics and instead an intersectional approach to provision needs to be considered.

Despite the appropriateness of intersectionality for this research, there are limitations of using this approach in social policy. The first limitation is concerned with the subjective and arguably abstract social statuses used in this research. While gender and motherhood are relatively straightforward to define - statuses such as social class and young motherhood are more complex. Indeed, for the purposes of this research, as set out in section 4.3.1 – I have created my own interpretations of both social class and young motherhood. This approach to defining statuses creates problems when applying these to policy as we may accidently exclude groups who are in need of support. If for example, programmes only target lone mothers up to age 25 (because that is how young motherhood is defined) this may exclude mothers who are slightly older but who still have similar levels of need.

The other limitation of intersectionality in my research is my assumption that all of the statuses I have identified – young motherhood, lone motherhood, gender and social class are all contributing to disadvantage. However, it could be argued that only social class (and gender to a lesser extent) is important in producing oppression. According to Salem (2016) this is a common critique from some of the Marxist-

Feminist standpoints[158] . Indeed, many of the barriers reported by the mothers in this research such as accessing education and adequate housing could be addressed through their incomes being increased (to pay for childcare and rent a home of their choosing for example). Money would also indirectly mitigate against other disadvantages (such as conditionality associated with lone motherhood and social security benefits). Therefore, perhaps rather than needing an intersectional approach to policy, the focus should be solely on increasing the income of women.

Finally, the use of intersectionality as a basis for social policy is limited because while people may hold positions of oppression; the same people may also hold positions of privilege. This according to Hankivsky and Jordan-Zachery (2019) can cause difficulties when attempting to address disadvantage through the use of intersectionality in policy. Reflecting on this research, some of the mothers had a partner and therefore while their youth, gender and social class may act as forms of oppression – their partnered status may have the opposite effect. Therefore, support packages designed using an intersectional approach would likely need to consider: 'how many statuses of disadvantage must someone hold to be eligible for support?' This will lead to gaps in provision if people are denied support because they are not deemed 'disadvantaged' enough (for example – if they have three rather than four discredited statuses).

As a consequence of these limitations, intersectionality may hinder rather than enhance policy responses and greater consideration is therefore needed before using this as a basis for addressing multiple disadvantages.

My approach to applying intersectionality is also limited by not taking into consideration other statuses that may create additional disadvantage in the lives of my participants, most notably: disability, ethnicity and sexuality. Previous research has implicated all three of these as forms of stigma and disadvantage (see Morris, 2011; Hackett et al. 2019 for disability; Bhopal, 2018 for ethnicity and Bachmann and

[158] It should be noted that many Marxist-Feminist writers are increasingly seeing intersectionality as important.

Gooch, 2018 for sexuality). Ethnicity and disability have also been identified as important statuses in research looking at groups who have been most affected by austerity and welfare reform (Fisher and Nandi, 2015; Malli et al, 2018). Therefore, its likely my research would have benefited by considering additional statuses when looking at stigma and recent changes in policy. Multiple intersecting statuses combine to create unique experiences and it is only through understanding these and their interactions that we are likely to capture lived experiences fully.

My research has contributed to our understanding of the withdrawal of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (TPS) and its associated funding. The TPS introduced a variety of services for young mothers from 1999 and this continued until 2011. The expansion of services during this period meant that young mothers formed part of the policy agenda. In the same period, policy also targeted lone mothers through support in gaining employment and additional benefits. However, the onset of austerity has led to a contraction in these policies and this has had a number of implications. While austerity is part of the central government agenda, it leaves a very visible mark on young mothers' everyday lives as they engage with their housing, education and children's centre services. Reductions in council budgets have led to the withdrawal of educational related support for these young women. There have also been changes to homelessness provision, where targeted support for young lone mothers has now been abolished with services now targeting lone mothers regardless of their age. Additionally, groups targeting young mothers have been subject to closures and reductions in provision. My research has also explored wider challenges such as the changes in social security benefits including the introduction of UC and the impact this has had and will continue to have on the lives of young women. One of the clear conclusions of my research is targeted support for young lone mothers has been removed completely from the current policy agenda.

Young lone mothers, who are poor even before becoming pregnant, do not have the material resources to relieve poverty for their children, and are highly dependent on the state. This vulnerability to state support means that when restructuring and reductions in welfare occur, young lone mothers are immediately impacted in

material and non-material ways. However, while governing young lone mothers in this way, policy makers often neglect their disadvantaged position. As established in my research, like many other mothers, young mothers budget their money carefully and often go without to ensure their children's needs are met. Therefore, the impact of austerity and welfare reform are also experienced by their children. However, policy does not take account of this and therefore the rights and entitlements of their children are easily overlooked as well.

As set out in Chapter Four, I had a personal connection to this research because of my former status as a young lone mother. This shared status with the participants helped enabled access to them and gave me a shared understanding to some of their experiences such as stigma. Despite some shared experiences, it is important to note that the economic and political context of when I was a teenage mother was very different than the context in which my participants found themselves raising children. My son was born in 2006 and austerity but welfare reform was not introduced until 2010. Therefore, this did not impact on my life or act as a barrier to education or housing.

Having conducted the interviews, analysed the data and identified the key themes this research has found that the current welfare and austerity context is having a significant impact on the lives of young lone mothers. Reflecting on my own experiences as a young lone mother, I wasn't subject to the same hardships. This was in part due to me not mothering as a teenager during a period that is characterised by reductions to services for young mothers as well as wider welfare retrenchment. I was, for example, able to access the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), which has since been withdrawn (Wilson, 2011)[159] and young mothers instead have to access the Bursary Fund, which as explored in Chapter Three, is far less generous. Furthermore, as I lived in Wales, I was also entitled to claim the Assembly Learning

[159] EMA has only been withdrawn in England. EMA is still available in Wales where I claimed it as a young person.

Grant[160]; a payment of £1500 for each year I was in further education. On attending university, I also benefited from lower tuition fees of just over £3,000 which were increased to £9,000 in 2012 as part of the government's austerity agenda (Chalari and Sealey, 2017). Additionally, I obtained non-repayable grants to finance my living costs meaning I could take out a smaller student loan. Most of the non-repayable grants were withdrawn[161] in 2015 – also as part of the austerity agenda (Morris, 2018). Therefore, with reduced support available, this could make higher education less accessible for the young mothers of today than it was for myself.

While there were young mother 'groups' available for me to access, I never took the opportunity to access any of these as I continued with my education; attending college five days a week. I also had a very tight friendship group that I remined part of even after becoming a mother and remained focused on retaining these relationships as opposed to making new ones with other young mothers. As explored in Chapter Seven, for many of the mothers in my research, the young mother groups were key for enabling them to make friends and to have an activity for both them and their children to engage in. This distinction is key because it reflects that while political and economic circumstances may be important, personal ones are as well. It is likely that my personal family circumstances which were different to most of the mothers in this research meant my experiences were different than theirs. I lived in the family home with my mother who took care of both myself and my son financially. Thus, while I received the same social security benefits as most of the mothers in this research, I did not need to use these to pay for food and bills as my mother covered these. Therefore, this gave me significantly more financial security than most of the young women in this research. Furthermore, living at home with family support allowed me to continue my education and overcome hardships other young mothers might

[160] This has since been renamed the Welsh Government Learning Grant (Student Finance Wales, 2019).

[161] The maintenance grants have only been withdrawn in England through Student Finance England. As the participants in this research lived in England this would impact on them. I applied to Student Finance Wales for maintenance grants and Student Finance Wales still provide them – and they have actually increased considerably from when I applied in 2010.

experience. For example, I was able to go to the university of my choice to pursue my education as my mother was able to pay the deposit and rent required for me to move cities and be close to the university.[162]

Therefore, as a final reflection on my positionality, I could relate to some of the participants experiences such as the whispering and the comments from others regarding my status as a young mother. However, the time period in which I was a young mother and my personal situation means that certain issues such as financial and housing insecurity which most participants talked about is not reflected in my own experiences.

8.5 Scope for Future Research

As established within this chapter, young lone mothers do not currently form part of the policy agenda. This 'invisibility' makes the process of researching this group of women in order to influence policy much more difficult. To enable researchers to focus policy attention on these women and indeed on all groups affected by austerity, we need a much a broader platform of engaged scholarship that prioritises the voices and experiences of those disadvantaged by austerity. The idea of 'engaged' scholarship is important because my research also showed that practitioners are concerned about the limited knowledge base and assumptions made by commissioners who are responsible for local policy decisions.

My research has approached youthful motherhood by looking at young mothers up to the age of 25. My research has demonstrated similarities between mothers aged 16 to 25, suggesting that future research needs to focus more on this extended age

[162] The university I attended does not have accommodation for students with children. It should be noted some universities do provide family accommodation. For example, University College London (n.d) and Newcastle University (n.d) have a small number of properties for families. Not all universities do, however, offer this type of accommodation and therefore this may limit the universities young lone mothers can apply to. Thus, access to accommodation could act as an additional barrier meaning mothers may not be able to attend the university of their choice.

bracket. Even when they cease becoming teenagers, these young women continue to experience stigma and disadvantage associated with their age. This is aligned to the policy environment that focuses on the same age bracket through various initiatives such as preventing conception and allocation universal credit entitlement. There is a clear advantage in research keeping pace with policy in this regard, and to give greater attention to an expanded definition of 'young' mother.

My research is an important base from which to develop more longitudinal insights into the dynamics of young mothers. What will my participants lives look like in the future? In a few years time, when they start claiming universal credit will their current predictions about impact turn out to be accurate? Will they be working or in education? How will their children be faring? How will their life conditions have changed and how will these changes 'position' them in terms of welfare support? To answer these crucial questions, we need longitudinal research, and that is where my future contribution will hopefully lie.

8.6 Thesis Conclusion

For almost ten years the UK has witnessed a sustained reduction in public services and welfare reform related policies. My research has found that young lone mothers are particularly affected by these changes and the impacts have been almost immediate. As I write the final sentences of my thesis, austerity and welfare reform continue and young lone mothers are likely to be further impacted. As a consequence of their poverty, they are likely to need access to state related welfare for a very long period, and perhaps indefinitely. If they remain lone parents, the disadvantage they experience today will only increase. Wider issues including the National Living Wage will also affect them as young people should they decide to engage in the labour market. Other changes in the labour market such as the decline in female jobs will also limit the opportunities available to young mothers as women.

In both theoretical and empirical terms, I have made use of the idea of statuses: age, gender, lone motherhood and social class, to show how they impact upon this group

of women in terms of identity and welfare reform. As my research has shown, each social status generates experiences and outcomes for young lone mothers, while the intersection of different statuses has a distinct and profound impact in terms of reinforcing stigma, heightening governance and affecting young mothers' social, economic and personal lives.

Current policy neglects the complex lives of this group of women and how each of their statuses as well as other issues such as domestic abuse impact their experiences. The lives of these young women are currently directly governed by policy in a number of ways, at both local and national levels. The expansion of services under the TPS meant that young mothers were recognised as a distinct group of women and were given targeted help and support. However, the recent contraction of these services through the withdrawal of TPS funding and reductions of council budgets have rendered this group of young women invisible on the policy agenda. By not acknowledging them as young mothers with both caring responsibilities and ambitions, current policy will only serve to disadvantage them further.

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Appendix One: Consent Form for Young Lone Mothers (Individual Interviews)

Mothering through austerity: Exploring the role of intersectionality and the impact of welfare reform within the lives of young, lone mothers in the UK.

Consent form for Individual Interviews

	Please Tick
1. I confirm that I have received an information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up until the analysis is completed for the research by the end of June 2018.	☐
3. I understand that all of my details including my name will be kept anonymous. Your data will be anonymised as soon as I transcribe your interview.	☐
4. I understand that I can review any information about me that is collected as part of the interview.	☐
5. I understand that my comments may be anonymously quoted within the Ph.D. thesis as well as reports, articles and other documents related to the research.	☐
6. I understand that the findings from this research will be made available for other to view both as hard copies and over the Internet.	☐
7. I agree for my interview to be digitally recorded and transcribed.	☐
8. I give permission for my income information to be used anonymously alongside the information I give during the interview.	☐
9. I agree to take part in the above study.	☐

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

Participant Ref _____

Appendix Two: Consent Form for Young Lone Mothers (Focus Groups)

Mothering through austerity: Exploring the role of intersectionality and the impact of welfare reform within the lives of young, lone mothers in the UK.

Consent form for Focus Group Interviews

	Please Tick
1. I confirm that I have received an information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up until the analysis is completed for the research by the end of June 2018.	☐
3. I understand that all of my details including my name will be kept anonymous. Your data will be anonymised as soon as I transcribe the interview.	☐
4. I understand that I can review any information that is collected as part of the focus group interview relating to myself.	☐
5. I understand that my comments may be anonymously quoted within the Ph.D. thesis as well as reports, articles and other documents related to the research.	☐
6. I understand that the findings from this research will be made available for others to view both as hard copies and over the Internet.	☐
7. I agree for my participation within the focus group to be digitally recorded and transcribed.	☐
8. I agree to take part in this study.	☐

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

Participant Ref _____

Appendix Three: Consent Form for Practitioners

Mothering through austerity: Exploring the role of intersectionality and the impact of welfare reform within the lives of young, lone mothers in the UK.

Consent form for Practitioner Interviews

	Please Initial
1. I confirm that I have received an information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up to until the analysis is completed for the research by the end of June 2018.	☐
3. I understand that all of my details including my name will be kept anonymous. Your data will be anonymised as soon as I transcribe your interview.	☐
4. I understand that I can review any information that is collected as part of the interview.	☐
5. I understand that my comments may be anonymously quoted within the Ph.D. thesis as well as reports and articles related to the research.	☐
6. I understand that the findings from this research will be made available for others to view both as hard copies and over the Internet.	☐
7. I agree for my interview to be digitally recorded and transcribed.	☐
8. I agree to take part in this study.	☐

_____ _____ _____

Name of Participant Date Signature

_____ _____

_____Name of Researcher Date

Signature

Participant Ref _____

Appendix Four: Receipt of Voucher Form

Mothering through austerity: Exploring the role of intersectionality and the impact of welfare reform within the lives of young, lone mothers in the UK

Receipt of Voucher

I confirm that I have received 2 x £10 Love2Shop Vouchers from Beth Jaynes for taking part in the above study.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher Signature: _____
Date:_____

Individual Interview Topic Guide

Individual Interviews

Before interview begins

- Thank participant for being involved with the research.
- Remind participant of the purpose of the research and what topics the interview will cover.
- Remind participants that I will be asking them to give details of their income at the end of the interview.
- Supply participant with a consent form and talk through each of the points.
- Discuss ethical issues and ensure they are comfortable with each of these.
- Confidentiality: If you were to tell me something that made me concerned about your safety or wellbeing I would need to tell someone. Before I did this, we would discuss it and think about who might need to be told.
- Invite participant to ask questions.
- Ask them to sign the consent form.
- Check participant is happy to start.
- State that I will now be turning the recorder on.

TURN RECORDER ON

Section One: Pregnancy and Motherhood

These first questions are about your experiences during your pregnancy and your current experience of being a mum.

- Tell me a bit about what its like being a mum?
- Have you always wanted to be a mum?
- Thinking about when you found out you were pregnant – how did you feel (Prompt: was it as shock?)
- Did you have support from people in your life? (Prompt: father of child, parents, friends).
- When you found out you were pregnant were you: at school? At college? Doing any training? In employment?
- Did you feel supported by your education supplier or employer?

Section Two: Current Household and background

Now I'm going to ask you some questions about your current living arrangements and your household.

- Where do you live at the moment?
- Do you have a partner?
- Could you start by telling me who lives in the home with you?
- How old is your child/your children?
- Are your children at nursery (if yes – how many hours?) or school?
- Do you have a job at the moment?
- Are you currently undertaking any education or training?

Section Three: Housing

- Current type of accommodation (Prompts: flat, house, sheltered housing)
- Current housing status (Prompts; living with parents, private/council rent)
- Do you like living here? (Prompts: what's good about it? Anything you don't like?)
- Do you live close to your family/friends?
- How much is the rent?
- Who is responsible for paying the rent? (Prompts: is it paid directly to the landlord? Do you get any help paying the rent?)
- Have you ever struggled to pay the rent? Why?

Section Four: Income

- A bit later on the interview, I'm going to ask you to complete an income sheet. But for now can I ask you what your main sources of income are (prompts: employment benefits, tax credits, child maintenance).

Employment:

If mother working:

- Access to job (Prompts: were you given support by the job centre? Did you feel you had to work?)
- Type of work and hours. (Use of zero hour contracts?) How long have you been in current job? Any previous jobs?
- Are you better off working?
- How easy is it managing being a mum and working? Does being a young parent make a difference?
- Is anyone helping you balance the responsibility of work and childcare? (Prompt: who?)
- Have you ever experienced any prejudice based on you young lone parent status in work? (Prompt: denied flexible working, any comments made.)

If partner working:

- Was you partner working before your child was born?
- Type of work and hours. (Use of zero hour contracts? Need to discuss this)
- Do you think you are better off as a family with your partner being in work? (Prompt: more money)

Benefits/Tax Credits:

- Are you currently in receipt of Universal Credit? If no - section 4a, if yes, 4b.

Section 4a: Not Claiming Universal Credit

- **Those claiming work related benefits**: Have you experienced any restrictions when claiming these benefits? (What are the conditions attached to your benefit? Any experience of sanctions?).
- Do you feel the advisers you speak to at the job centre take your lone parenthood status into consideration (and how this might impact on your ability to find and retain work)?
- Have you seen any reductions in your income over the past few years? (Sanctions? Having to claim different benefits?)
- Have you heard of Universal Credit? Do you know when you might be moved on to it?
- Do you have any concerns about Universal Credit?

OR

Section 4b: Claiming Universal Credit

- Tell me a little bit about your experience of claiming universal credit. (Prompts: claiming online, evidencing income, treatment at job centre).
- UC paid monthly. How do you find managing your money receiving it all at once?
- Have you always claimed UC or have you been moved on to it recently? (For those who have been moved on to it: need to understand what changes they have experienced and the challenges).
- Is you income the same month to month or does it change? (Follow up: of yes – need to understand how participants manage this).
- **Lone parents:** Do you feel the advisers you speak to at the job centre take your lone parenthood status into consideration (and how this might impact on your ability to find and retain work)?
- **Only relevant for mothers who have been claiming for a while:** Have you seen any reductions in your income over the past few years? (Sanctions? Having to claim different benefits?)

Child Maintenance:

- Do you currently receive Child maintenance? (Prompt: money from the father of your child).
- Do you receive this regularly or not?
- Current arrangement sent up? (Prompt: private arrangement or through CMS?)
- If you applied to the CMS – how did you find the process?
- If not in receipt –would child maintenance make a difference? (Prompts: having more money, be able to purchase additional items from child).

Section Five: Managing money

- Do you think you have enough money to support your family?
- Do you budget your money each month? (Do you look at how much you have and what you need to buy?)
- Which bills/items do you prioritise each month?
- Do you find yourself having to ever go without anything you need? (Prompt: reduced food budget, clothes)
- Do you ever worry about money? (Prompt: why – insecure employment, not enough money received in benefits/tax credits, high outgoings).
- If participant worries about money: What are the main things you worry about? (Follow up: what do you think would make a difference so that you don't have to worry about money?)
- What about debt – is this an issue you for you at the moment?
- Are you paying off any debts at the moment? (Follow up: how are you doing this? Any money deducted from benefits?)
- Have you ever needed money in an emergency? (Has this happened before? – what happened – who did you go to?)
- Have you at any time applied for emergency funding from the social fund or local council? (Prompt: experience of this).
- Access to local services such as charities and food banks for items such as food and clothes?
- Borrowed money from formal institution (Prompt: pay-day loans).

Section Six: Support for work, self and children

- Have you ever used a children's centre before?
- Do you ever go to any mother and baby groups? Are these designed for young mums?
- Any experience of reduction in the services you use?
- What services have you approached for advice and support since becoming a mother (Prompt: Citizens advice, local council services, Job Centre, family planning, housing services).
- Are there any barriers that prevent you accessing certain services (distance to travel\lack of transport, childcare issues).

- Is there any help you wish was around that isn't? (Prompt: leisure activities, mother and baby groups, support services)
- Services that you used to access that have closed/are no longer available.

Section Seven: Barriers to employment (for participants not currently engaged in paid work).

- Are you currently looking for work? (If not: Do you think you would consider looking for work in the near future? Do you think you would face any problems with doing this such as finding childcare?)
- How are you finding these experiences?
- Attendance of work focused interviews at the Job Centre (experiences of these – what's helpful – what's not helpful?)
- Work Programme: Have you ever taken part in this or been asked to?
- Have you been offered any training by the Job Centre –experiences of this and issues such as childcare.
- As a young lone parent – what challenges do you think you face when looking for work? (Prompts: lack of local opportunity, childcare, changes in income).

Section Eight: Looking to the Future and Supporting Young Mothers

- What jobs have you done in the past? Do you see yourself going back to doing this?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years? (Prompts: having more children? Studying/Working? Issues with these – benefit cap, child tax credit capped at 2 children, housing issues).
- What could be done to help and support you in the future (Prompts: support getting into work or education, childcare, benefits/universal credit, child maintenance, additional financial help).
- What could be done to support and enhance the lives of young lone mothers? (Prompts: more support services, free leisure activities, easier access to education, improvements so benefits system).

Income Sheet (Notes)

- What is your main source of income at the moment? (Where does your money come from?) Prompts: work, income support, universal credit.
- For participants who have additional sources of income: 1. Who does this income come from? 2. How often do you receive it (as a one off, regular basis of if you need it for something in particular?)

Focus Group Interview Topic Guide

Before the focus group interview begins

- Ensure group is situated in an appropriate circle.
- Thank the participants for being involved with the research.
- Remind participants of the purpose of the research and why a focus group is appropriate for the study.
- Explain the process of the focus group to participants and each section that will be covered. (Note: at this point – check that everyone is happy to proceed).
- Supply participants with a consent form and a sticky label to write their name on.
- Talk about the ethical issues with participants.
- Explain to participants that throughout the interview I will address them by name and why (to make transcribing the interview easier. I will however, not use your real name later when I write up the research).
- Invite them to ask questions.
- Ask them to sign the consent form.
- Collect consent forms.
- Check that everyone is happy to start.
- State that I will now be turning the recorder on.

TURN RECORDER ON

Section 1: Getting everyone to introduce themselves

Interviewer: We're just going to start by going around and introducing ourselves. If you could state your name, at what age you had your first child and the ages of your child or children now. I'll start – My name in Beth…….

AFTER EACH PARTICIPANT HAS INTRODUCED THEMSELVES

Interviewer: Thank you, that is very helpful for me.

Section 2: Broad discussion: Day to day lives of young mothers

- What is life like for you on a daily basis? Feel free to talk about any aspect of your life. (Prompts: Do you have meetings with services such as a health visitor or the job centre? What sort of activities do you get up to? What challenges do you face? What is rewarding?)

Section 3: Experiences of Motherhood

Interviewer: We are going to talk a little bit now about what society thinks a good mother should be like. I then want us to think a little bit about how we learn how to be mothers and then finally about where we can go if we need advice and support.

- Qualities society believes a 'good' mother should have. Explore.
- Are there any particular sources you use to model your own parenting behavior? (Prompt: Did you seek advice from your parents? From a book or on-line? From a heath visitor?)
- Where do you go if you need to help? (Prompts: advice on parenting, childcare).
- Lack of access to support. (Prompt: any advice or support you needed but didn't know where to go or it wasn't available.)
- What other services do you think you could benefit from as a mother? (Prompt: access to more advice about parenting, advice on child health).

Section 4: Identity and Youth

Interviewer: When writing the proposal for this research I was particularly interested in experiences of young people.

There have been a lot of events that have affected young people in recent years. The labour market has offered them few opportunities, they face a difficult decision when doing post-school education because of the costs involved and policy changes such as the National Living Wage have failed to benefit them.

What I'd like to focus a bit on now is how you think all of these changes have affected young people and how they have affected you personally.

- What challenges do you face as a young person? Explore. (Prompt: education, training, finances).
- Have you ever accessed any support groups for young people? (Prompt questions: What was your experience of accessing these services? Do you think the organisations that help young people have a good understanding of your needs?)

Section 5: Identity and Gender

We have spent some time considering the experiences of young people in the current climate and discussed some of your experiences as young people. I'd like us to now apply some of these ideas to gender and your status as women.

In a similar way to young people, women often face a number of hardships associated with their status. Unlike age, that changes, gender remains static and your position as a woman may effect what you do and how people respond to you for the rest of your life.

- Do you think that people see young mothers and young fathers differently? (Prompt questions: Do you think they direct more negativity towards young mothers? If so – why might this be – is it because they are women?)
- Do you think there are different levels of acceptable behaviour between young men and young women? (Prompt: sexual promiscuity amongst males and females).

Section 6: Motherhood and intersecting statuses

Interviewer: I want us to talk now about your views on motherhood and your experience of being mothers. As I mentioned in the information booklet I gave you – I am interested in some of the challenges faced by young mothers brining up children and how we might be able to change some of these. The next set of questions focus a bit more on some of the challenges you face, from your point of view as well as some of your experiences with other people.

- Challenges experienced by a young mother. Explore. (Prompt: is this linked to age, gender, motherhood?)
- Have you experienced negative comments related to being a young mother? Explore.
- Factors that influence the perceptions of young mothers.
- Have you ever changed your behaviour to reduce the chance that people will make comments about you or act a certain way towards you?
- Thinking about the attitudes of other people and some of the behavious towards young mothers that we spoke about earlier. What do you think influences these attitudes and behaviours? (Prompt: Is it age or gender? Or because you are a parent? Or is it all of these aspects that are important?)
- Do you think that as you get older (and are no longer a 'young' mother) that attitudes and public perceptions will change towards you? (Do any of these changes relate to the loss of 'youth' status?)

Section 7: Informing others and changing attitudes

Thank you for talking that that through with me. This is the final set of questions for this interview. For this part of the interview, I would like to ensure you all have the opportunity to suggest ways in which we might be able to change the attitudes held by other people about young mothers.

- Do you think it is possible to change the attitudes that the media and/or the general public hold about young mothers? (Prompts: How could we do this? What message would you like people to hear?)
- Do you think a change in attitudes will affect your experiences with people? Explore.

Practitioner Topic Guide

Before interview begins

- Thank participant for being involved with the research.
- Remind participant of the purpose of the research and what topics the interview will cover.
- Supply participant with a consent form and talk through each of the points.
- Discuss ethical issues and ensure they are comfortable with each of these.
- Invite participant to ask questions.
- Ask them to sign the consent form.
- Check participant is happy to start.
- State that I will now be turning the recorder on.

TURN RECORDER ON

Introduction and type of work

- Can you tell me a little bit about the work you are doing at the moment?
- Do you work with young mothers, fathers or both? (for those working with both – explain the focus will be on young mothers for this interview)
- What type of information/advice/support do you give to them?
- Do you know how many young parents you are working with at the moment?
- How long have you been doing this?
- Has your work changed since you have been doing it – if so how and why?
- What do you enjoy most about your job?
- What do you find that is most challenging about it?

Importance of work with young mothers

- What difference do you hope to make to lives of the mothers you support?
- Do you think that young mothers have unique needs that are different to other mothers? Other young people? Young fathers?
- What disadvantages are young mothers currently facing? Why?
- Do young mothers engage well in the support that is available to them? If not what is stopping them?
-

Prejudice and Discrimination experienced by young mothers

- Do you think young mothers are vulnerable to prejudice and discrimination? If so why?
- If this is so, is this liked to their gender? Age? Motherhood?
- What factors do you think influence people's perceptions of young mothers?
- How do you feel young mothers respond to this prejudice?
- How much does this prejudice impact does it have on their lives?
- What problems are unique and more likely to effect young mothers?
- Do you thing young **single** mothers have additional unique problems?

Commissioning of services for young mothers

- Do you think that people responsible for commissioning services for young mothers have a good understanding of their needs?
- Can you talk briefly about cuts made to service for young mothers in your local area (remind participants here that during the write up these will be very vague to prevent the identification of the area)
- What impact has this had on young mothers? Short term and long term
- Why have services been reduced/disappeared?
- What changes do you think could be made by commissioners to better support young mothers? Is a working group needed to look at how young mothers needs might be met?
- What additional services that don't currently exist would benefit young mothers?
- Are you happy with your field of work or would you change it in any way?
- Is there anything you would like to add?

List of useful organisations

Family Lives

Provide free guidance and support on any aspect of parenting.

Contact Number: 0808 800 2222

Website: http://www.familylives.org.uk

Single Parent Action Network

Have a great website that covers a variety of issues for single parents including: benefits, child maintenance and advice on debt amongst other issues.

Website: http://www.singleparents.org.uk

Gingerbread

Support and advice for lone parents on a variety of issues. They can conduct benefit calculations and tell you what you are entitled to.

Helpline Contact Number: 0808 802 0925

Website: www.gingerbread.org.uk

Turn2us

Advice on benefits as well as other financial support such as applying for grants. They also have an online benefit calculator to help you work out everything you are entitled to.

Contact Number: 0808 802 2000

Website: www.turn2us.org.uk

Appendix Nine: Pen Portraits of Participants

Emma

In March 2017 Emma, her partner and their five-month-old daughter had just moved into their first social rented home. Previously, they had been living in supported temporary accommodation where they were taught skills such as how to cook and budget their money. Emma and her partner had been together for a year before she became pregnant – they are planning to marry and have more children in the future. Emma's partner had recently started paid work. Emma was studying on a catering course at college before she became pregnant; she hopes to return to this when her daughter starts nursery in 18 months.

Mia

Mia was living with her partner and her nine-month-old daughter in her parents' house. Her partner had moved in shortly after their daughter was born. They were currently considering their options of moving into their own home – looking at both private renting and purchasing a home through shared ownership. Mia currently worked two part time jobs (equivalent to full time) and her partner worked one full time job. They paid a childminder to look after their daughter while they worked. Mia and her partner hoped to get married at some point but had not considered more children and Mia was unsure if she wanted any more.

Grace

Grace had three children but currently only her youngest child (a son aged two months) was living with her. Her other son who was aged two was living with her mother and her eight-year-old daughter with her former partner. Grace had contact with her two children but this was limited and Grace reported wanting to see them more. Most of her childhood was spent in statutory care after being removed from her parents and Grace reported never having a permanent home. She was now living in supported housing designed for young mothers (up to age 25) and their children. Grace had been living in the supported housing for around six months and had arrived there after fleeing her former partner's home after he had been violent towards her.

She currently had an injunction in place against him and Grace hoped he would not apply for contact with their son.

Lucy

Lucy has been living in social housing for around three years with her five-year-old son. Prior to moving in there she had been living with her parents. Lucy worked two part time jobs which together were almost a full time equivalent. Her son was in his first year of school and went to after school club while she worked. Lucy had separated from her former partner before their son was born. Her former partner is estranged from both Lucy and their son.

Ava

Ava is currently living in her mother's home; she moved back just prior to the birth of her daughter who was now seven weeks old. Prior to this, Ava had run away from her mother's home and spent almost two years 'wolfing' (working in exchange for food and accommodation) on different farms. She was advised to return home by a social worker who became involved after her sexual activity was reported to the police (she was 15 at the time). Ava did not enjoy living with her mother but accepted it was the best thing for her and her daughter. As a consequence of leaving home, Ava had not completed her GCSEs but was keen to go back to education and was looking at art and design courses at local colleges. The father of Ava's child was not currently involved in her life and they had not spoken since before their daughter was born.

Evie

In August 2017, Evie had been living in her current social housing flat for just over a year with her 6-year-old son who attended the local school. Prior to living in this flat Evie and her son lived with her parents. Evie was studying for her undergraduate degree and had just completed her second year of a three-year course. Once this was completed, Evie hoped study for a postgraduate qualification and eventually work with children. Evie credited the college for young mothers (which had since closed) where she gained GCSEs and completed an access course, arguing studying there had allowed her to attend university. She was able to support her son through student

loans in addition to housing benefit and tax credits. Evie's former partner and the father of her child did see their son regularly and she also reported her family (especially her father) were supportive and helped with childcare responsibilities.

Robyn

Robyn had spent most of her childhood in statutory care and after leaving care had experienced a complex housing journey. This started with her being placed in adult temporary accommodation before being moved into supported mother and baby accommodation – designed for young mothers up to age 25. She had recently moved into a social rented flat – however this new flat had a number of disrepair issues and she had also experienced anti-social behaviour in the building. Robyn did have a boyfriend (who was the father of her five-month-old daughter), however they were currently living separately. Robyn was working before her daughter was born but since her birth had decided she would like to attend university. As Robyn didn't leave school with qualifications, she was currently looking at colleges with the aim to return to complete her GCSEs and then an access course. Despite being in care Robyn had continued to have contact with her birth mother and her mother was also involved in her own daughter's life.

Brooke

Similarity to some of the other mothers in this research, Brooke spent most of her childhood in statutory care. She does not have a relationship with her birth family as an adult. Brooke currently lived in social housing with her six-month-old daughter and was mostly satisfied with her accommodation. Her first child, also a daughter, had passed away as a baby and this had meant social services becoming involved (Brooke was not responsible nor implicated in the death). Brooke was currently undertaking an educational qualification with other young mothers at a children's centre. She was unsure of what she wanted to do afterwards but did not want to enter the labour market until her daughter went to school. The father of Brooke's child is currently estranged from her and their daughter.

Heidi

Heidi attended a children's centre with other young mothers and was currently undertaking an educational qualification there. She was considering starting work once the she had completed the qualification and was looking at options for childcare for her two children - one aged four years and the other aged two years. Heidi had lived with her children in her mother's home before moving into her own social home 14 months ago. While Heidi was separated from the father of her children, he was still involved with their lives and the children often stayed with him on the weekend.

Maria

Maria had spent much of her pregnancy homeless and sofa surfing after her mother found out she was pregnant – they reconciled just before the birth of her daughter (now two years old) and Maria moved back in with her. However, Maria did not enjoy living with her mother and wanted a place of her own. In addition to looking after her own daughter Maria also took care of her two younger siblings while her mother was at work. Currently, Maria was undertaking an educational qualification with other young mothers at a children's centre. She was unsure what she wanted to do after this and felt her lack of qualifications would really limit her employment opportunities. Maria is estranged from her daughter's father and he does not have contact with their child.

Ivy

Ivy has two children (aged two years and four years) and was also pregnant with her third child. While now living in a social housing flat, Ivy had previously lived in supported mother and baby accommodation for mothers up to age 25. Ivy was not currently living with the father of their children – however he did come to the house and see them regularly. Similarly, to some of the other young mothers in this research, Ivy was currently undertaking an educational qualification at a children's centre. Her current concern was the overcrowding in her social home; having to share a two bedroom flat with two and soon to be a third child. Ivy was not sure about employment in the future and was focusing on welcoming her third child and requesting a larger house from the council.

Poppy

Poppy was currently living in supported mother and baby accommodation designed for mothers up to age 25 with her two-year-old son. Prior to this, Poppy had been living in a hostel while she was pregnant. She was estranged from the father of her son and he does not have any contact with their child. Poppy was finding it difficult to make any decisions regarding work or education because she anticipated moving into her own social home soon. If she started attending college or took up a job close to her current accommodation, this could mean she would have to travel when she moved. However, she did confirm that she was considering attending a college that was close to the city centre meaning it would be accessible wherever she lived.

Enid

Enid was living in supported mother and baby accommodation designed for young mothers up to 25 with her two-year-old son; she had lived there since his birth. Before moving into the mother and baby accommodation Enid had lived in a hostel while pregnant. Although Enid had spent most of her childhood in the care of statutory services, she was now close to her birth mother. The father of Enid's child was estranged and he does not have contact with their son. For the past eight months Enid had been undertaking a hairdressing course at college and was hoping to spend another year at college which would provide her with an enhanced qualification in the hair and beauty sector. Enid was focused on completing her course and was hoping to work in the hair and beauty industry in the future.

Lilly

In July 2017, Lilly had been living with her partner and her two daughters (one aged three years and the other six months old) in their social housing home for a year. Prior to this, Lilly, her partner and their eldest child had been living in an annex in Lilly's mother's garden. Lilly's partner worked full time and she reported being happy taking care of their children at home. She reported she would consider working in the future once her children are both in school but was concerned her lack of qualifications would limit the types of jobs she could do.

Carla

Like many of the young mothers in this research, Carla had experienced a number of hardships both before and after becoming a mother. She was taken into statutory care at age eight and after running away from there at age 16 she was homeless and staying with her partner in a tent; the relationship became violent shortly after they met. At 17 Carla became pregnant and was subsequently able to access support and escape her abusive relationship and move into social housing with her daughter (now two years old). Carla was currently living with her new partner whom she had a second child with (now aged six weeks). She worked part time and her partner worked full time. Carla was focused on moving her family into a new social home as the flat they were currently living in had a number of disrepair issues.

Kylie

Kylie, while currently living in social housing with her son (who was almost two years old) had experienced a difficult housing journey. She had spent her pregnancy in a hostel where she witnessed violence and drug taking. After giving birth, she moved into supported mother and baby accommodation (for mothers up to age 25) before eventually finding a social home 18 months later. However, Kylie reported being unhappy with her current flat due to the crime that existed in the local area and was currently trying to move. In the summer of 2017, Kylie was considering returning to education. However, she wasn't sure how she would be able to manage this with childcare responsibilities. At age 25, Kylie was too old to access the Care to Learn Grant and her family were unable to support her with care. Kyle was hoping her son would be able to access some free nursery time once he tuned two – which would hopefully allow her to attend college part time. Kylie's former partner is estranged and he does not have contact with their son.

Madison

Madison was living with her mother and step father in their home. In addition to taking care of her young son who was aged one, Madison was also involved in regular caregiving of her two younger siblings. Madison's older sister and her boyfriend also lived in the small three-bedroom house, making it severely overcrowded.

Consequently, Madison was on the waiting list to move into temporary mother and baby accommodation and hoped to eventually access permanent social housing. Despite not gaining any qualifications at school, Madison was keen to work and was happy to do most jobs including working in retail or in a pub. She was waiting until her son could access nursery at age two and then intended to look for work. Madison's former partner is estranged and he does not have contact with their son.

Hailey

Hailey had recently moved into her own social home; prior to this she had lived with her mother. She was mostly satisfied with hew new social home although she lived on the eighth floor and the lift was often out of service; causing difficulties in getting her one-year-old son up and down the stairs. Hailey was currently working part time in a cleaning job. The shifts were very early in the morning making accessing childcare very difficult but fortunately Hailey's mother was able to take care of her son while she worked. Hailey wanted to work more hours to increase her income but felt this wouldn't be possible while her son was so young. The father of her son did have contact with him but Hailey reported this was irregular and he did not always keep to their agreement of coming over on the weekend.

Riley

Riley was currently living in temporary mother and baby accommodation (for mothers up to age 25) with her two-year-old son. She was also six months pregnant. She reported an on/off relationship with the father of her two-year-old and her unborn child; although she hoped one day they would live together. While Riley was focusing on the impending birth of her second child, she was also interested in pursuing education. Having not gained any qualifications in school, she wanted to attend college to gain her GCSEs. However, she felt because childcare would be difficult to access both her children would need to be at school first.

Zoe

Like many of the mothers in this research, Zoe was living in temporary mother and baby accommodation for mothers up to age 25. Prior to this she had been living in

private rented accommodation with her former partner and their son who was now 18 months old. When they separated Zoe was made homeless and was living in temporary accommodation while on the waiting list for a social home. Zoe loved her job working for the ambulance service but gave this up after separating with her partner. She was planning to return to work once her son started school. Zoe's former partner had some contact with their son. He also paid maintenance but this was small and irregular; sometimes he would directly buy things their son needed.

Taylor

Taylor had grown up in statutory care. When her child (now aged two years) was born when she was 16, social services were able to sign a tenancy agreement for a social home on Taylor's behalf. Despite becoming a mum at such a young age, Taylor had remained in school and was currently finishing up her final year in further education. She was in receipt of the Care to Learn Grant which covered her child care costs. After completing her course, Taylor was planning to attend university. By gaining a degree, Taylor felt this would give her the best opportunity to enter and remain in the labour market. Taylor was estranged from the father of her child and he did not currently have contact with their son.

Cali

Currently living with her aunt and uncle, Cali was waiting to access social housing. Her daughter was only six weeks old and therefore, she had not considered whether she would like to return to education or whether she would like to work. As a lone parent, Cali argued both education and work would be difficult for her to do at the moment. She also reported not having any qualifications which she felt would further disadvantage her. She had separated from the father of her child while she was pregnant and while he had not met their daughter yet, Cali hoped he would eventually get in contact.

Zara

Having recently moved into a social home with her two-year-old son, Zara reported this felt like an important milestone for her – gaining a home of her own. Prior to this

Zara had experienced a difficult housing journey; living in temporary mother and baby accommodation for young mothers up to age 25 and while she was pregnant - in a hostel. Zara found living in the hostel particularly difficult due to the antisocial behaviour she witnessed while there. Zara reported she wanted to work in the future when her son started nursery but she wasn't sure what she wanted to do yet. She felt her not having any educational qualifications would limit her opportunities. Zara and her former partner were estranged and he was not currently having contact with their son.

Trinity

Living with her mother, Trinity was still at school and getting ready to take her GCSEs. Despite only giving birth six months ago, this had not interrupted her education. She was hoping afterwards to study for her A Levels and apply to university. She was in receipt of the Care to Learn Grant which paid for her childcare while she was at school. Trinity was in a relationship with the father of their child – he also lived with his own parents. They regularly saw each other and while he wasn't currently paying any money towards their child; they had agreed he would when he started work. Trinity hoped she and her partner would be able to live together once she finished school.

Bella

Bella was currently living with her partner and their eight-month-old daughter in private rented accommodation. There were a number of disrepair issues with the home and they were currently looking for somewhere else to rent. Bella's partner was in employment but they were still struggling financially and despite wanting to stay at home with her daughter, she felt she would likely have to find work to increase their household income. Bella and her partner had moved from Spain to the UK a few years ago. With both of their families still living in Spain, their access to social support was limited.

Ella

Ella had a two-year-old son and was also seven months pregnant with her second child. She currently lives with her mother and is attending a group for young mothers where she was studying for an educational qualification. Ella's eldest child did not have contact with his father. Although she was separated from the father of her unborn child, they were still in contact and Ella hoped he would be there for the birth of their child. Ella wasn't sure what she wanted to do after completing the education course at the group and was focused on preparing for the arrival of her second child.

Nina

Nina and her ten-month-old son currently lived with her mother. Nina was estranged from her child's father and he was not currently having contact with their child. Nina had left school without any qualifications and reported wanting to go to college once her child started school.

Jenna

Jenna has two sons – a two-year-old and a six-month-old. She currently lives in social housing. The father of her children does not live with them but they are in a relationship and he contributes to her household budget when he can. Jenna hoped he would eventually move in with them. Jenna was not currently considering work or education but would consider entering employment once both her children were at school.

Helen

Like some of the other participants in this study, Helen's former partner and the father of her daughter had been abusive towards her. She has escaped the home they shared and was now living in supported mother and baby accommodation (for mothers up to age 25). Helen's daughter was only nine months old and she had not decided whether she wanted to attend college or work. She was currently focused on taking care of her daughter and hoping to secure permanent social housing.

Appendix Ten: Information Sheet for Young Mothers (Individual Interviews)

Motherhood, Youth and Identity.

An Invitation to be part of an important Research Study looking at the lives and experiences of young mothers.

A thank you gift

You will be given £20 worth of Love2Shop Vouchers as a thank you for taking part.

Need more information?

If you have any questions or comments about the research, you can contact me – Beth Jaynes
T: 07951556034 Email: B.M.Jaynes@bath.ac.uk
My supervisor – Tess Ridge is a Professor of Social Policy at the University of Bath and you can also contact her.
T: 01225 385838 Email: T.M.Ridge@bath.ac.uk
You can also write to either of us. Please address correspondence to: Social and Policy Sciences Department, University of Bath, Calverton Down Road, Bath. BA2 7AY.

My Ph.D. is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council through the University of Bath.

Can you help?

My name in Beth Jaynes and I am a Ph.D. student, currently studying at the University of Bath. I moved to Bath from South Wales in 2009 with my son to attend university here. My research interests are concerned with how changes in social security and reductions in funding to public services (such as libraries and children's centres) have affected young mothers and their children.

I am inviting you to take part in a special piece of research that looks at young mothers and their experiences of motherhood. By taking part in this research you will have the opportunity to tell me about what life is like for young women bringing up children. I want to hear directly from young mothers, in your own words, about the rewards and challenges of bringing up children whilst also being a young person.

Why is the Research important?

The aim of this research is to understand your lives and explore some of the problems facing young mothers today. During the interview you will be able to suggest ways you think young mothers could be better supported. As a young mother you will be able to offer a unique point of view on motherhood that is relevant for this research.

This research will cover a number of key topics including how young mothers are affected by the recent changes made to benefits and tax credits, the reduction of services that support mothers and other changes that may have impacted on their experiences of motherhood. This research will also focus on the needs of young mothers from their own point of view and how advice and support services can be developed to meet the needs of young mothers. By taking part you will be able to present your experiences in your own words and suggest ways in which the government could make changes that will benefit you.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

If you choose to take part:

- You will be asked to take part in an interview that will be conducted by myself.
- I will ask a set of questions with the intention to develop a discussion between us about your experiences.
- The interview will take around 60 minutes.
- With your permission, I would like to digitally record the interview. This will allow me to accurately write up and understand your perceptions of young motherhood and ensure it is your experiences informing the findings of this research. This recording will only be of your voice and no video cameras are used.
- The only person who will have access to this digital recording will be myself.
- The interview can be conducted in your own home or in a place of your choosing.

It is my responsibility to ensure that your identity is protected. All of your responses will remain anonymous and when I write up my research I will invent a name for you that will be different from your real name. No identifying details such as where you live will ever be mentioned within the research. You can also withdraw from the research process at any time and do not need to give a reason why.

Appendix Eleven: Information Sheet for Young Mothers (Focus Groups)

Motherhood, Youth and Identity.

An Invitation to be part of an important Research Study looking at the lives and experiences of young mothers.

A thank you gift

You will be given £20 worth of Love2Shop Vouchers as a thank you for taking part.

Need more information?

If you have any questions or comments about the research, you can contact me – Beth Jaynes
T: [redacted] Email: B.M.Jaynes@bath.ac.uk
My supervisor – Tess Ridge is a Professor of Social Policy at the University of Bath and you can also contact her.
T: 01225 385838 Email: T.M.Ridge@bath.ac.uk
You can also write to either of us. Please address correspondence to: Social and Policy Sciences Department, University of Bath, Calverton Down Road, Bath. BA2 7AY.

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I am inviting you to take part in a special piece of research that looks at young mothers and their experiences of motherhood. By taking part in this research you will have the opportunity to tell me about what life is like for young women bringing up children. I want to hear directly from young mothers, in your own words, about the rewards and challenges of bringing up children whilst also being a young person.

Why is the Research important?

The aim of this research is to understand your lives and explore some of the problems facing young mothers today. As a young mother you will be able to offer a unique point of view on motherhood that is relevant for this research.

This research will cover a number of key topics including how young mothers are represented by the media, their daily lives and any challenges they come across as well as their experiences as a woman and as a young person. This research will also focus on the needs of young mothers from their own point of view. By taking part you will be able to present your experiences in your own words.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

If you choose to take part:

- You will be asked to be part of a focus group consisting of other young mothers.
- The interviewer (who will be myself) will ask a set of questions with the intention to develop a number of discussions within the group.
- The interview will take around 60 minutes.
- With your permission, I would like to digitally record the discussion. This will allow me to accurately write up and understand your perceptions of young motherhood and ensure it is your experiences informing the findings of this research.
- The only person who will have access to this digital recording will be myself.

It is my responsibility to ensure that your identity is protected. All of your responses will remain anonymous and when I write up my research I will invent a name for you that will be different from your real name. No identifying details such as where you live will ever be mentioned within the research. You can also withdraw from the research process at any time and do not need to give a reason why.

Motherhood, Youth and Identity.

An Invitation to be part of an important Research Study looking at the lives and experiences of young mothers.

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Need more information?

If you have any questions or comments about the research, you can contact me – Beth Jaynes:
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You can also write to either of us. Please address correspondence to: Social and Policy Sciences Department, University of Bath, Calverton Down Road, Bath. BA2 7AY.

My Ph.D. is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council through the University of Bath.
The ethical permission code for this project is: S18-001

Can you help?

My name in Beth Jaynes and I am a Ph.D. student, currently studying at the University of Bath. I moved to Bath from South Wales in 2009 with my son to attend university here. My research interests are concerned with how changes in social security and reductions in funding to public services (such as libraries and children's centres) have affected young mothers and their children.

I am inviting you to take part in a special piece of research that looks at young mothers and their experiences of motherhood. I have already interviewed young mothers individually and as part of focus groups to explore their experiences during this period of austerity and welfare reform. I am now seeking the opportunity to talk to practitioners who support young mothers and explore why young mothers might have unique needs and how services that support them have been affected in recent years.

Why is the Research important?

The aim of this research is to understand and explore some of the problems facing young mothers today. As gatekeepers you have already introduced me to my main sample of young mothers and I am now seeking your views to enable me to generate a more detailed understanding of young mothers.

During the interview you will be asked questions about the type of service you provide for young mothers, the impact you believe these services have, the needs of young mothers and how they should be responded to as well as how services for young mothers should be commissioned.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

If you choose to take part:

- You will be asked to take part in an interview that will be conducted by myself.
- I will ask a set of questions with the intention to develop a discussion between us about your experiences.
- The interview will take around 45 minutes.
- With your permission, I would like to digitally record the interview. This will allow me to accurately write up and understand your experiences and arguments informing the findings of this research. This recording will only be of your voice and no video cameras are used.
- The only person who will have access to this digital recording will be myself.
- The interview can be conducted in your own home or in a place of your choosing.

It is my responsibility to ensure that your identity is protected. All of your responses will remain anonymous and when I write up my research I will invent a name for you that will be different from your real name. No identifying details such as where you live or who you work for will ever be mentioned within the research. You can also withdraw from the research process at any time and do not need to give a reason why.

Appendix Thirteen: Income Questionnaire

Participant Name:	Participant Age:	Number of Children: Age of Children:	Current Housing Status:	Partner in Household: YES/NO	Financial help with council tax: YES/NO

Income Source	Amount	Received how often	Received by who
Income Support			
Job Seekers Allowance			
Employment and Support Allowance			
Child Benefit			
Child Tax Credit			
Child Maintenance			
Disability Living Allowance (For Child)			
Working Tax Credit			
Housing Benefit			
Discretionary Housing Payment			
Personal Independence Payment			
Universal Credit			
Carers Allowance			
Employment			
Bursary Fund			
Education Loans (e.g – Professional Development Loan)			
Education Grants (e.g – for childcare)			
Any other income			